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All God's Creatures

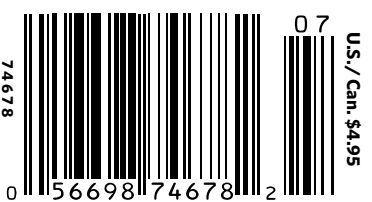
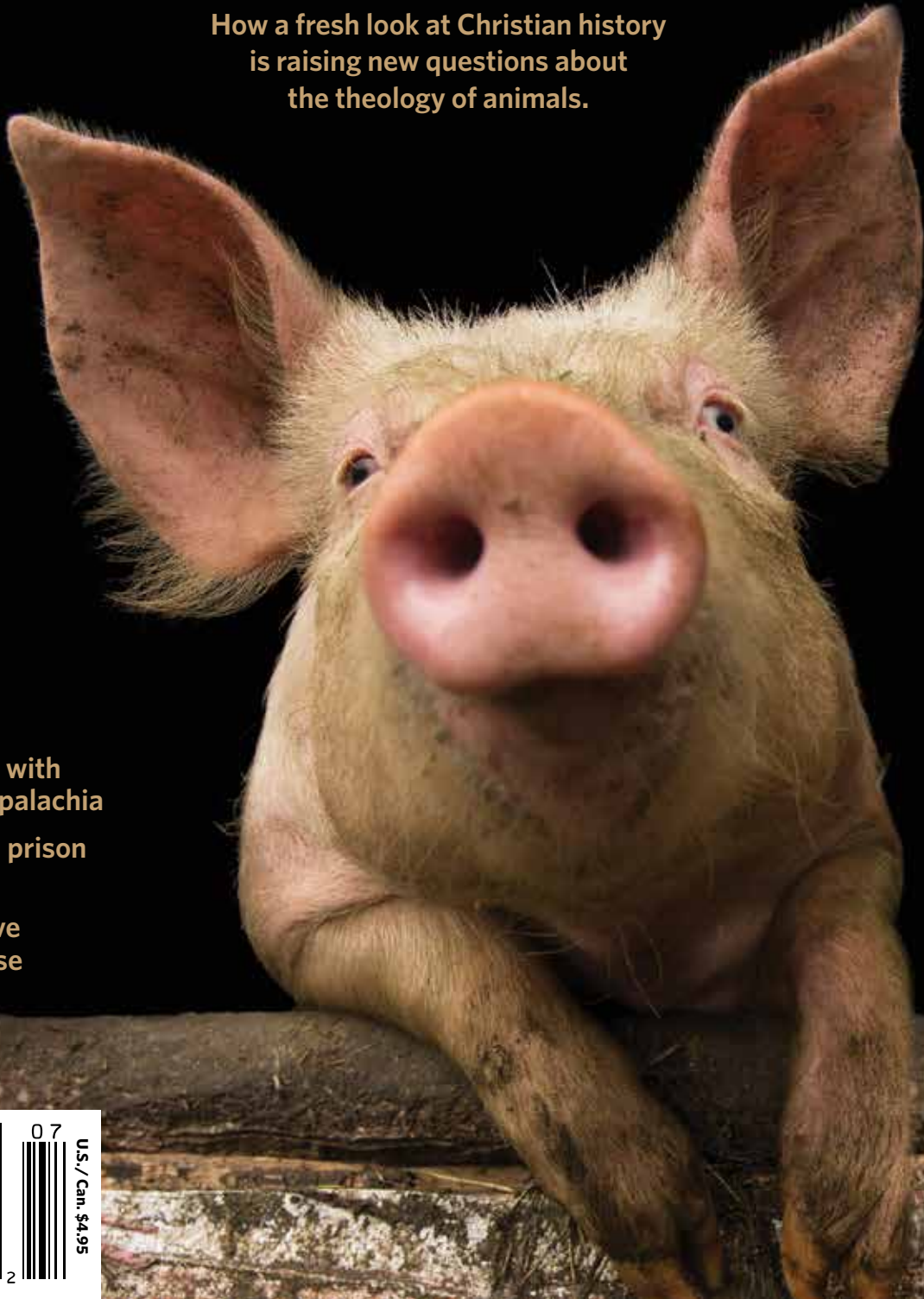
How a fresh look at Christian history
is raising new questions about
the theology of animals.

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murder in Appalachia

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TWICE A YEAR WE—the editors—ditch the office for a three-day stint in a West Virginia cabin to plot out upcoming issues of the magazine. We bring pens, notepads, three bags of tortilla chips (with a hint of lime), and Juba, an energetic black mixed-breed dog who lives with senior associate editor Rose Berger.

There are benefits to having pets around. The presence of an animal has been shown to improve collaboration; likewise, petting a dog increases oxytocin and decreases stress hormones. In one clinical trial, cancer patients who received a visit from a certified therapy dog during their treatment showed increased emotional well-being. And though

we can't prove it, we come up with better article ideas when our brainstorming sessions are punctuated by games of "hide the dog toy."

How should people of faith think about non-human animals? And not just beloved pets like Juba, but obscure creatures (ever heard of an olm?), endangered species (the Javan rhinoceros), and animals we'd prefer not to think about (chickens on a factory farm). Or to put it into theological language: When Jesus talks about "the least



of these," does that include animals?

In this issue, Catholic ethicist Charles Camosy tackles an old question: Can we afford to address animal suffering when there is so much mistreatment of humans? And Liberty University professor Karen Swallow Prior traces the often-forgotten history of evangelical concern for animal welfare—a history she describes as a history of "caring about the things God cares about as revealed in scripture." ■

Letters

The Opposite of Fear

While I am encouraged that Rev. Rob Schenck articulates and promotes powerful theology among evangelicals and in his article "Should Christians Own Guns?" (May 2016), I am deeply saddened by the chasm of fear that divides the church in the United States. Having had the privilege of discourse and worship with Rev. Mitri Raheb at Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, our contingent understood what persecution of Christians and a dangerous environment really mean. Still, these Christian brothers and sisters maintain and foster nonviolence. I believe that Jesus considered fear and love opposites. Thank you to *Sojourners* for championing love.

Anne Cowburn

West Grove, Pennsylvania

A Matter of Health

I just finished reading and rereading "Should Christians Own Guns?" I am a 75-year-old retired family physician and a lifelong hunter and gun owner. I am not a member of the NRA, though. Preventive medicine was one of my most important jobs as a family doctor, and the NRA's successful blocking of any funding to the Centers for Disease Control for the study of gun violence in the United States is, to me, unconscionable. That is one main reason that I belong to Texas Gun Sense, a group here in Austin that promotes sensible gun legislation and

Jesus considered fear and love to be opposites.

works against "campus carry" in Texas (so far unsuccessfully). Thanks to *Sojourners* for publishing this very timely and compelling piece.

Al Lindsey

Austin, Texas

Importance of Language

My heartfelt thanks to Rob Schenck for his excellent essay, "Should Christians Own Guns?" But I feel compelled to point out an unintended irony arising from an error in word choice. Before he evokes the dehumanization of others that is needed to be willing to kill them, he says, "I believe the increased presence of firearms among American evangelicals, including pastors that are now armed in the pulpit ..." By using "that" instead of "who," he dehumanizes those gun-wielding pastors. Nevertheless, this essay and Rev. Schenck's ongoing ministry to deal with this ever-growing problem are laudable examples to all. **E.J. Emerson**

Monroe Township, New Jersey

Crash Course in Patience

The April issue of *Sojourners*, with Tobias Winright's cover story, "Learning the Art of Patience," showed up in my mailbox on the four-week anniversary of an accident that left me unable to walk or drive for two months. I've learned a few things from my

crash course on patience. Having to ask and wait for help is as uncomfortable as any physical pain, especially when one is used to being independent.

Margaret Mead described a healed femur as the sign of a civilized society because in a group of hunter-gatherers, if a person couldn't walk, they wouldn't survive. The healed bone that connects the hip to the knee proved that others showed mercy and compassion to the injured. I envision the kind of compassionate country we'd have if everyone among us who is hurting could be carried by the rest of us. And that would identify us as truly civilized.

Regina Clarkin

Peekskill, New York

Correction: In our June 2016 interview with Aaron Mair, we wrote that grassroots organizing efforts in Albany, N.Y., were initially rebuffed "by Sierra Club staff." It was actually the executive committee of the local Sierra Club chapter, which consists of non-staff volunteers.

"On the other hand ..." Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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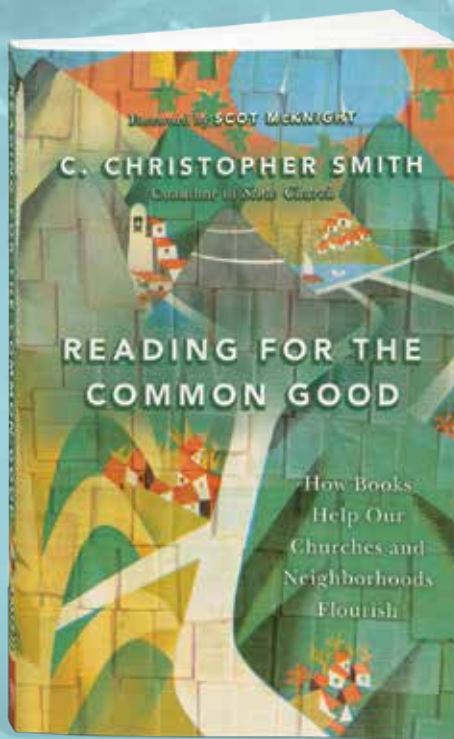
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BY JIM WALLIS

The Categories That Divide Humanity



AS AN OPPRESSED and marginalized group, the early Christian community understood intersectionality, the ways that systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination overlap. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This was a baptismal text and liturgical formula in the early church. In baptism, new Christians acknowledged three oppressive categories that divide humanity—race, class, and gender. At their baptisms, the new church was declaring that as a community following Jesus, they were called to undermine, overcome, and take down those barriers and begin to create a new and united community.

Inherent in the Galatians text is the understanding that the three divisions work in tandem with one another. They build off of one another. Some have power in all

and the kidnapping and enslavement of another. European and Americans couldn’t reconcile their belief that *all* people were created in the image of God with what they wanted to do with the Indigenous population and enslaved Africans. Rather than changing their plans, they shifted their beliefs, saying that people of different races were less than human.

This was America’s original sin, and it still has a major impact on our lives today. Despite many great strides, much still hasn’t changed. Minority populations have been left behind without good education, jobs, and homes—and these factors are all connected.

In light of all that’s happened in our country these past few years, from the Black Lives Matter movement to the new uprising of white supremacy, we’ve learned that nobody can hide from racial injustice. It’s not one issue among many—it’s a deeply rooted sin that affects us all.

THE GREAT POLITICAL and historical reality behind the incendiary rhetoric and conflict we have been experiencing in our country is this: In just a few decades, America will no longer be a white-majority nation; we will instead be a majority of minorities.

Some of our citizens, especially many older white Americans, are deeply fearful and resentful about the potential loss of white supremacy and privilege. They will not let this happen without a fight. Already there is a clear strategy to try to ensure that the changing demographic does not change America. There is a five-part strategy in place to delay, obstruct, and veto the new America.

First, gerrymander congressional

districts. Second, shift the goal of immigration reform away from full citizenship, preventing the enfranchisement of 11 million new voters. Third, incarcerate mass numbers of citizens, leading to their political disenfranchisement. Fourth, put in place new voting regulations that make it harder for many people to vote. Fifth, elect a strong-man candidate who promises to do to “whatever it takes” to ensure that America does not change.

GLOBALLY, those who are on the “wrong” side of the categories, the most marginalized, find themselves most vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change, war, displacement, and poverty. As conflict rages in the most fragile countries, millions of people, many of them women and children, are displaced from their homes. The global response has been unacceptable. In Europe and the United States, politicians have stoked xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiments to block refugees seeking asylum. Walls are being built to keep the “others” out. Aid and relief to these areas are being cut in favor of expanding military budgets. Race sits at the intersection of all of these issues.

We need to look with an unflinching focus at how race is affecting the work that we do. We need space for lament—and then we must press onward toward a vision for repair and healing through solutions that are already in practice and new solutions we create together.

We all live and work at the intersection of these issues. The strategy we are up against is clear. Our response must be too. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Some white Americans are deeply resentful about the loss of white supremacy and privilege.

three; others have power by virtue of their position in one category, but lack it in others; and, most important, the most marginalized person is the person that falls on the “wrong” side of all three.

This reality is still true today, though now we recognize additional categories. It still holds true that the people who are most marginalized are those who fall on the “wrong” sides of the divisional categories. In the United States, the most foundational category is race.

The United States was founded by the near-genocide of one people

Heidi Thompson



Celebrating Daniel Berrigan

More than 800 people gathered in New York City on May 6 for the funeral Mass of Daniel Berrigan. A peace activist, poet, and Catholic priest, Berrigan famously sparked religious protest against the Vietnam War when he and eight other Catholic activists burned draft records in Catonsville, Md., with napalm. At his funeral, Berrigan's sister-in-law, Elizabeth McAlister, repeated how the Catonsville 9 explained their actions in 1968: "We have chosen to say, with the gift of our liberty, if necessary our lives: The violence stops here." Berrigan died on April 30; he was 94.

By Sherry Lee Linkon

Working-Class Blues (and Grays)

Frustration and resentment can draw working-class people in multiple directions—including activism.

THE STATE OF THE U.S. working class gives us many reasons to feel discouraged. Wages have stagnated even as productivity has increased significantly. With independent contracting and the "gig economy," jobs have become less secure. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that most job growth will be in low-paying fields, such as home health care and food service. Union membership, a central measure of the social cohesion and political power of the working class, has fallen to 11 percent, down by almost half since the early 1980s.

Medical research links economic frustration to rising death rates among middle-aged whites and addiction among younger adults. Long encouraged to believe that hard work would translate into economic stability, working-class people have, as one of the researchers, Angus Deaton, put it, "lost the narrative of their lives."

Two important shifts in how people think about class and work suggest reasons for cautious optimism. They also

suggest possible roles for faith-based organizations.

The first reason might seem counter-intuitive: Americans in general, and younger Americans in particular, increasingly identify themselves as working class. Gallup polls over the past 15 years show that the number of Americans who identify themselves as upper-middle or middle class has fallen by 12 percent, while the number who identify as lower or working class has risen by 15 percent. More than 56 percent of millennials identify as working class, compared with 44.2 percent of baby boomers. Even younger adults with college degrees—which pollsters often use to identify respondents as middle-class—find themselves working part-time, low-wage jobs, struggling with student loan debt, and unable to afford the traditional markers of adulthood, such as home ownership. These surveys (and this year's political campaigns) suggest growing anger over economic inequality, but as community

organizers know, frustration and anger can inspire action.

Of course, action can take many forms, but that's why my second reason for optimism is so important. A recent Pew study shows that younger adults view unions *positively*. Although that isn't (yet) translating into higher union-membership rates, it does suggest support for organized efforts to fight economic injustice. Many younger adults have been inspired by the Occupy movement, campus organizing against sweatshops, and battles over the minimum wage.

These campaigns often link class issues with injustices rooted in race, gender, immigration status, and sexuality. The working class has always been diverse, but class activism has not always engaged fully with fights around other forms of inequality. As younger adults engage with multiple movements for justice, they may generate fresh potential for building broader coalitions and more inclusive organizing that integrates class, race, and other issues.

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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Younger people's identification with the working class and their engagement with economic inequality will not automatically translate into activism, of course, much less into social change. Even as younger activists organize their own movements, faith-based organizations can provide support, models for connecting belief and service with advocacy, and opportunities for action, as well as a sense of community and a moral basis for commitment.

Such efforts may also strengthen younger people's connection with religion. Despite evidence that many younger adults do not identify with any organized religion, some younger people may become more deeply engaged in religion through activism.

I saw this recently at a "Labor Seder" in

Washington, D.C., led by young organizers involved in Jews United for Justice. We see it, too, among younger Catholics inspired by Pope Francis, such as the student activists at Georgetown University who are supporting campus workers and community organizers for economic justice.

Frustration and resentment can draw working-class people in multiple directions. But we can find reasons for hope—and opportunities to make connections within and beyond the church—in the emerging resistance of the young. ■

Sherry Lee Linkon is a professor of English at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and edits the weekly blog Working-Class Perspectives.

By Terrence J. Rynne

Toward a New Theology of Peace

Are "pacifism" and "just war" the only choices?

THIS SPRING, the Vatican hosted a historic convocation focused on what Pope Francis called "the active witness of nonviolence as a 'weapon' to achieve peace."

Eighty participants from around the world told striking, at times heroic, stories of nonviolent peacemaking at the Rome gathering, convened by the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi International and the Vatican's justice and peace office.

Many of them arrived directly from situations where they are mediating between violent factions using pragmatic nonviolence fueled by Christian faith—as in Uganda, Iraq, Colombia, and Mexico. Others are engaged in nonviolent peacebuilding in regions recovering from traumatic violence—as in Sri Lanka, Kenya, and the Philippines. Some are active in unarmed civilian accompaniment, shielding people under threat of violence—as in Palestine, Syria, and South Sudan. Theologians, ethicists, and international policy negotiators contributed broader context to the situational experiences.

The conversation focused on four key questions: 1) What can we learn from experiences of nonviolence as a spiritual commitment of faith and a practical strategy in violent situations across cultural contexts? 2) How do recent experiences of

active nonviolence help illuminate Jesus' way of nonviolence and engaging conflict? 3) What are the theological developments on just peace and how do they build on the scriptures and the trajectory of Catholic social thought? 4) What are key elements of an ethical framework for engaging acute conflict and addressing the "responsibility to protect" rooted in the theology and practices of nonviolent conflict transformation, non-violent intervention, and just peace?

The convocation concluded with an astonishing document, presented to Pope Francis, titled "An appeal to the Catholic Church to recommit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence." Recommendations included a request for a papal encyclical calling Christians to return to their fundamental vocation of nonviolent peacemaking. That means rejecting just war theory as the "settled teaching" of the church and replacing it with Jesus' life and teaching as the foremost guide.

WHAT COMPELLED the group to make these recommendations? First: Confidence that the life and teaching of Jesus provide a much more appropriate guide for responding to violence and making peace than current just war teaching. The call of Jesus to be proactive makers of peace has been strangled

From the Archives

Summer 1972

Jesus Was No Chauvinist!

JESUS WAS a feminist, that is, a person who promotes the equality of women with men, who treats women primarily as human persons and willingly contravenes social customs in so acting. The gospels give no evidence of Jesus ever treating women as inferior to men. When the restricted state of women in the Palestinian Judaism of that time is recalled, even this mere absence of a male superiority attitude is extraordinary. ...

Though a rabbi, Jesus often addressed women, even women of ill repute, in public, and he spoke to them as primarily human persons, not as "sex objects." ... Jesus strove to communicate the notion of the equal dignity of women in many different ways. Once, in response to a challenge, he related three parables in a row, all of which contained an image of God. The first story was of the shepherd who left the 99 sheep to seek the one lost—the shepherd is God. The third was of the prodigal son—the father is God. The second story was of the woman who sought the lost coin—the woman is God!

It is clear from the gospels that Jesus vigorously promoted the dignity and equality of women in the midst of a very male-dominated society: Jesus was a feminist, and a very radical one. Can his followers attempt to be anything less? ■

Joyce and Dick Boldrey were contributing editors to The Post-American (predecessor to Sojourners) when this article appeared.



in the church because just war theory was made the centerpiece of church teaching on war. The focus on war has diverted Christians from the real challenges of building cultures of *peace*—preventing war, solving conflicts before they fester, building community, and reconciling peoples.

Recent scripture scholarship makes it clear that Jesus took nonviolent action to resist oppressive structures of violence. He was nonviolent himself, and he used nonviolent action to resist the oppression of his time. In his life and his teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, he showed an alternative to "fight, flight, or accommodate": weaponless resistance. Love your enemies; do good to those who persecute you. Turn enemies into friends by the way you live.

Second: The early church consistently followed the Sermon on the Mount, and they took great pride in doing so. They refused to join the revolt against Rome. They returned love for hate as they endured Roman persecution. They so demonstrated Jesus' call to peacemaking that, as Thomas Merton said, "Christianity overcame pagan

Rome by nonviolence."

Third: Active nonviolence is both faithful and effective. Those who gathered in Rome had all witnessed the dead-ends of violence and surprising successes using nonviolent strategy. Policy analyst Maria Stephan shared the groundbreaking research she has done with Erica Chenoweth scrutinizing more than 300 resistance campaigns. Their data found that "between 1900 and 2006, campaigns of nonviolent resistance were more than twice as effective as their violent counterparts."

Some of those who have criticized the Vatican conference invoked the tired old debate between just war and pacifism—missing the point altogether. The topic at issue here is proactive, positive, nonviolent strategic peacemaking, an emerging body of data, theology, and praxis that goes well beyond the false choices of justifying war or refusing to confront it. ■

Terrence J. Rynne, author of Jesus Christ, Peacemaker, is founder of the Marquette University Center for Peacemaking.

By Allen Johnson

Coal Country Goes Bust

Getting away with murder in Appalachia.

WEST VIRGINIA'S coal-addicted economy is busted. Dozens of bankrupt coal companies are busted. A coal company CEO is busted for flagrant safety violations that contributed to an explosion killing 29 miners.

Boom-and-bust cycles have a jagged history in the central Appalachian coal basin of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and southwest Virginia. America's industrial revolution prospered on Appalachia's steam and coking coal. Hard-gained union struggles brought miners and their communities an improved living standard. Yet as time marched on, machinery replaced miners, the coal industry busted unions, Appalachian coal seams played out, and cheaper Western coal and fracked shale gas outcompeted.

Coal-dependent economies are now tanking. Miner layoffs have skyrocketed. Policymakers have long ignored forecasts of coal's impending decline. The West Virginia

legislature, facing a major state revenue shortfall, is considering drastic budgetary cuts—such as closing state parks, college branch campuses, and state police detachments—while, incredibly, introducing bills to attempt to bring back the coal industry by reducing its severance and worker-compensation taxes.

Coal will not bounce back. From coal's perspective, the national debate on coal and climate change has largely been lost.

The Clean Power Plan announced by the EPA in June 2014 seeks to reduce climate-warming CO₂ emissions 30 percent by 2030. Projected air quality improvement will also deliver significant financial and life-protecting health benefits. However, since West Virginia politicians dance to the strings of their coal-industry puppet masters, State Attorney General Patrick Morrisey is leading a coalition of 25 states asking a federal court to strike down the

Clean Power Plan, calling it a “war on coal.”

In April, Peabody Energy, the world’s largest coal corporation, joined the ranks of dozens of other coal companies to file Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Steam coal demand has decreased as power generation increasingly transitions to natural gas and renewables, complemented by improved consumer efficiency. However, a leading reason for coal industry bankruptcies is that, five years ago, several major coal corporations made huge investments to acquire coking coal assets (metallurgical coal used in making steel), much of it in central Appalachia. The gambit failed when anticipated overseas-export demand dropped, stranding their newly acquired assets.

Companies undergoing Chapter 11 bankruptcies have sought to shed “unproductive” assets, such as retirees’ and disabled miners’ pensions and health benefits, and responsibilities for environmental cleanup. When Patriot Coal filed for bankruptcy in 2012, a judge permitted it to jettison health responsibilities while authorizing company executives \$7 million in retention bonuses.

IN 2010, 29 MINERS died in a coal dust explosion at the nonunion Upper Big Branch mine in southern West Virginia. Court testimony revealed that under pressure to maximize output, Massey Energy officials sidestepped safety regulations and gained advance warning of inspections. The Mine Safety and Health Administration failed to enforce multiple violations. The trail eventually led to Massey CEO Don Blankenship, whose trial resulted in a misdemeanor conviction of “conspiring to willfully violate mandatory mine safety and health standards.” Blankenship was sentenced the maximum \$250,000 fine and a year in prison. He is appealing. Meanwhile, relatives and friends of the 29 dead miners are incensed at justice so lightly served.

Federal proposals to resuscitate the busted Appalachian economy are forthcoming. A looming question is whether there remain enough human and infrastructure resources in the coal-forsaken rural hills and hollows for help to take hold. ■

Allen Johnson lives in rural West Virginia. He coordinates the advocacy organization Christians for the Mountains.

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How Race Intersects

The time has come for us to realize that our success is bound together and the intersections upon which our issues meet is where justice can be found. And that's especially true when we talk about race. This year at The Summit, an annual convening hosted by Sojourners, faith and justice leaders will gather June 22-24 in Washington, D.C., to explore how race intersects with everything from criminal justice and gender to mass incarceration and climate change. **View the video and livestream details**

at summitforchange.com

QUOTED

“In the midst of a sexist and even misogynist conservatism that calls itself ‘Christian,’ and a secular Left that too often discounts the value of faith in the public sphere, we desperately need women faith leaders.”

—Jim Wallis

on women's leadership in the church
sojo.net/patriarchy

SERIES

Why we keep the feast

In the grand narrative of what God is doing in the world, saints are the acknowledgements page. Just as authors acknowledge the people to whom they are indebted, the church acknowledges saints as people whose faithfulness makes our own possible. Or at least that's how Sojourners



online assistant Ryan Hammill explains it in his introduction to *Keeping the Feast*, an ongoing series at sojo.net honoring the saints

whose radical love of God and neighbor still inspire us today.

So for Stephanie Pacheco, **St. Katharine Drexel** is not just a Philadelphia heiress who used her fortune to create schools for African Americans and Indigenous people, but also a reminder to “let truth crack our shell of complacency to see others who are different as equally beloved by God.”

And for Colin Chan Redemer, the martyrdom of **Sts. Perpetua and Felicity** serves as a reminder to embrace the “holy confusion” that comes from laying aside birthrights, breaking social categories, and holding fast to our faith.

In keeping with the church's time-honored tradition, we are remembering each saint on his or her feast day—typically the day of their death. Or as some say, the day of their “birth into heaven.” The online series is ongoing and updated regularly throughout the year, including **St. Thomas the Apostle** (July 3), **Sts. Elizabeth and Barbara of Russia** (July 5), and **St. Alexander Schmorell** (July 13).

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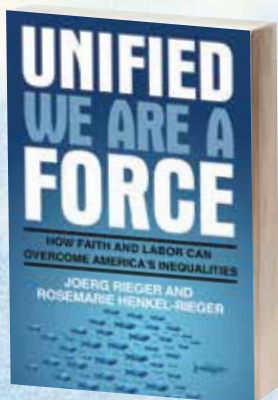


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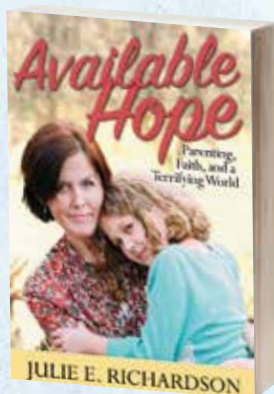
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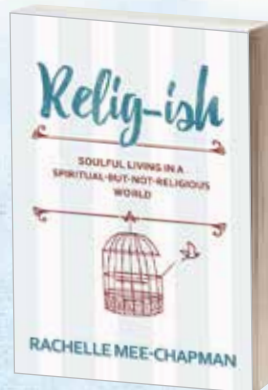
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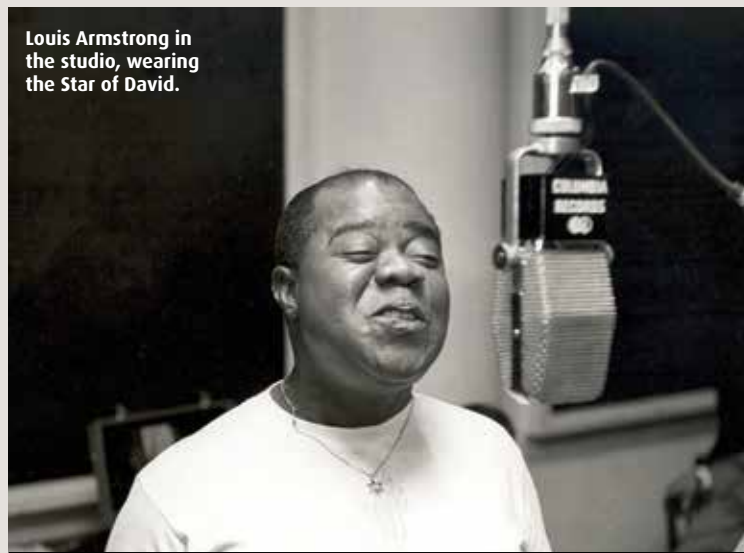
American Songs, American Stories

IN THE EARLY 20th century, a group of esteemed scholars gathered in a little northeastern pocket of their own making and concerned themselves with the question of finding a distinctly American music. Where was this music? How might it develop? Could there be, out there somewhere, an American Bach?

They looked far and wide in the places that they knew; they searched for faces that they might recognize; they listened deeply in the idioms with which they were familiar. And they came away disappointed.

Jazz critic Gary Giddins chortles as he recounts the tale, pointing out that if these American Brahmins had simply deigned to take a train south from Boston to New York City, and stepped into the Roseland Ballroom on a Thursday night, they would have experienced the American Bach, Dante, and Shakespeare all rolled into one: Louis Armstrong.

Born to a 15-year-old who sometimes worked as a prostitute, raised in a New Orleans neighbor-



Louis Armstrong in the studio, wearing the Star of David.

File photo

hood so violent it was known as “the Battlefield,” sent to a juvenile detention facility at 11 for firing a gun into the street—his early years would surely put him on the pipeline to prison today.

Had that occurred, the distinctly American music that Louis Armstrong created might never have happened. The American songbook, as we know it today, simply would not exist.

DUKE ELLINGTON said Louis Armstrong was so good he wanted

him on every instrument. Legendary trumpeter Wynton Marsalis commented that the only way to describe his sound was to say there was light in it. Ken Burns writes that Armstrong is to American music what Einstein is to physics, Freud is to psychiatry, and the Wright brothers are to travel.

As for himself, Armstrong liked to say that his purpose was to blow his horn so beautifully the angel Gabriel would come out of the clouds.

It’s an apt metaphor. Discovering diamonds where other people see coal is one of the great themes of religious traditions. As the scripture says, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Louis Armstrong might well have been that rejected stone rather than the foundation of American music had it not been for a Jewish immigrant family from Lithuania.

When he was 7, Armstrong went to work for the Karnofskys, who gave him the job of blowing the tin horn on their junk wagon when it approached potential customers. The Karnofskys

took Armstrong into their home, making sure he had a good dinner at the end of every day. They taught him to sing Russian Jewish lullabies. Those lullabies, the tin horn, and the music around him on the streets of New Orleans turned something in Armstrong. When he saw a cornet in a corner store, the Karnofskys helped him buy it. When he put the cornet to his lips, he found he could blow out the notes of simple songs. Then, as he said, “here come the blues.”

Out of respect for the role the Karnofskys played in his life, Louis Armstrong wore a Star of David until he died.

A Lithuanian Jewish immigrant family who owned a junk wagon nurtured the genius of a teenage prostitute’s son from a New Orleans ghetto who would go on to remake American music.

That’s not just the history of the American songbook. That’s the essence of the American story. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.



Out of respect for the role the Karnofskys played in his life, Louis Armstrong wore a Star of David until he died.

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CRE

Concern for the welfare of animals has deep roots in scripture and Christian history • by KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

IN MANY WAYS, the modern animal-welfare movement was birthed by evangelicalism.

Given current-day categories and political alignments, this history is surprising. But evangelicalism's concern for animal welfare began with John Wesley, who many consider the father of evangelicalism. Wesley offered weighty words about animals and their treatment by humans. In his sermon "The General Deliverance," for example, Wesley laments the plight of animals subjected to human cruelty:

And what a dreadful difference is there, between what they suffer from their fellow-brutes, and what they suffer from the tyrant man! The lion, the tiger, or the shark, gives them pain from mere necessity, in order to prolong their own life; and puts them out of their pain at once: But the human shark, without any such necessity, torments them of his free choice; and perhaps continues their lingering pain till, after months or years, death signs their release.

In Wesley's lifetime, which spanned most of the 18th century, animals played a central and visible role in most people's lives. Animals were sources of food and clothing and means

of transportation. Sadly, animals were also a common source of entertainment in various forms of brutal blood sports—including bull and bear baiting, dog fighting, and cock throwing. As plentiful paintings, literature, sermons, and tracts from the age show, cruelty to animals was as pervasive as the animals themselves.

The general understanding of animals at the time was gravely influenced by a Cartesian, mechanistic view of the world. The same disciples of the Enlightenment who envisioned God as a distant watchmaker also viewed the "lower creatures" as mere machines. Well into the 19th century, animals were viewed under the law, according to the Animal Legal and Historical Center at Michigan State University, "as items of personal property not much different than a shovel or plow."

But evangelicals helped change the view of animals. In their efforts to reform all of society, early evangelicals saw that, in its coarsening effect, this prevalent brutality toward animals worked against human receptivity to the gospel. So while evangelicals worked to end the slave trade, improve

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All God's CREATURES

“How we protect the least of these—pigs in this case—creates an ethical framework around how we protect the greatest of these—people and then God’s reputation.”

—Joel Salatin

the morals and manners of both the upper class and low, and increase biblical literacy, they sought also to eliminate cruelty toward animals. For example, during the same years he was leading the campaign to abolish slavery, William Wilberforce helped found the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the first organization of its kind. As a result of early evangelicals, cruelty to animals became increasingly prohibited by law and rejected by civilized people.

Like a machine in a factory

Today, in place of animal fights, we have professional sports, movies, video games, and an endless array of entertainment choices. Even zoos and circuses are quickly falling out of favor because they treat animals so unnaturally. Additionally, Americans spend more than \$60 billion a year on pets. Putting all these facts together, it’s easy to think that animal cruelty is largely a thing of the past and that stewardship over animals need not be a pressing concern for Christians today.

But we still eat meat.

In fact, Americans eat more meat per person than do the people of nearly any other country in the world. And how animals are treated before their lives are sacrificed for our use is a central concern to those given by God the task of stewarding creation. Because the Bible has been understood to give its blessing on the use of animals for food, as well as for labor and clothing, the question today for many evangelicals—who are defined by high regard for God’s word and witness to the world about the authority of that word—is not so much whether but how.

The fact that the vast majority of consumers are far removed from the processes by which animal products are derived does not diminish stewardship responsibility. Indeed, the more distant we are from the process, the greater our responsibility becomes because of the added responsibility we bear for those we employ to provide us with our meat and leather. It should tell us something that most of us would not choose willingly even to witness some of these practices because they are so unendurable.

As stewards of the animals God declared to be “good,” evangelicals have to reckon with the methods of animal agriculture that emerged in the mid-20th century—methods that radically transformed the lives of

billions of animals and are in wide use today. An article in *Hog Farm Management* from the 1970s reveals the mindset behind modern farming practices: “Forget the pig is an animal,” the article said. “Treat him just like a machine in a factory. Schedule treatments like you would lubrication. Breeding season like the first step in an assembly line ... In other words approach building a pig just like an automobile or anything else.”

Similarly, *National Hog Farmer*, in the same era, advised, “The breeding sow should be thought of, and treated as, a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine.”

Such practices were promoted as more productive and cost-effective than the pastoral farms of our grandparents. These intensive systems—sometimes called industrial or factory farming—use extreme confinement that allow animals little or no movement to increase stocking density, ease feeding and waste management, and maximize production while lowering costs. Such systems promised increased profit and decreased global food shortages, hitting the sweet spots of the particularly American form of cultural evangelicalism: capitalism, entrepreneurship, and humanitarianism.

These values are echoed by an evangelical Christian I know who operates a large agribusiness that supports commercial egg producers. Requesting anonymity out of fear of targeting by animal rights groups, she assured me in an email interview that her Christian faith is central to how she runs the business. She insists that large-scale operations are humane and feed more people. Using “traditional” caging systems (by which she means 20th century, not first century, tradition), she said, “allows for the best health and safety of the birds, where they are protected from predators, parasites, and disease.”

She argues that European Union regulations requiring laying hens to be raised cage free “have caused drastic egg shortages and increased costs.” Such laws, she maintains, “hurt farmers and consumers and jeopardize the health of the chickens.” She says that egg farmers in the United States produce 6.9 billion eggs each year for consumption by 323 million Americans, and that “at 17 cents a serving, eggs are the cheapest natural protein that you can buy.” If the U.S. follows Europe’s

example in requiring chickens to be raised cage free, she claims, it will take 10 times the land in current use for egg production, a larger percentage of Americans to go into farming, and a decline in egg quality and bird health.

“Is it moral to jeopardize the health of chickens so they can be somewhat less confined?” she asked me. “Is it moral to create an artificial standard for eggs that does nothing but drive up the cost of a product that was easily available and affordable for everyone, including the poor?”

The most inefficient model ever

Joel Salatin tells a very different story. Salatin, owner of Polyface Farm in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, argues that treating animals in ways that allow them to function as they were designed to function—whether flapping, grazing, rooting, or roosting—is not only moral, but Christian.

In his newest book, *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs*, Salatin makes his coming-out not only as a Christian but even as a graduate of the ultraconservative Bob Jones University. In the book, Salatin makes explicit how his Christian faith informs the farming practices that have made him famous for years, methods that center on allowing chickens, cows, and pigs to live (and die) according to God’s design for them.

Doing so not only honors the animals God made, Salatin says, but is essential to our Christian witness. He argues that “it is how we protect the least of these—pigs in this case—that creates an ethical framework around how we protect the greatest of these—people and then God’s reputation.” He continues, “Our children can’t see God. But they can see pigs. Our friends can’t see God. But they can see pigs. When we honor the pigness of pigs, we create a philosophical imperative that we can see.”

Upholding “the sanctity and dignity of the pig—the glory of the pig” (and, by extension, all animals), Salatin argues, provides Christians with “a credible launchpad to a bigger discussion about the glory of God.” He continues, “Putting the pig in this position does not make God smaller; it makes God bigger and more awesome. ... Because we care about the pigness of pigs, we care about the Godness of God.”

But what about people? What if it’s true

that industrial farming practices alleviate human suffering? I asked Salatin these questions in an email interview. He responded that these concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) “are the most inefficient production model ever invented.”

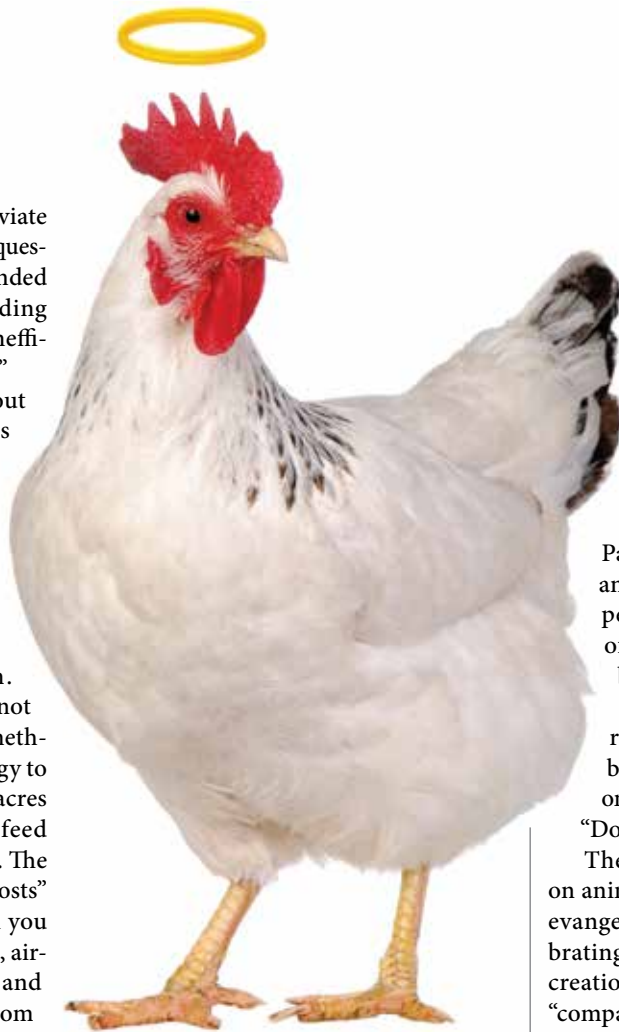
Not surprising, the narrative about concentrated animal operations echoes the mythos of American individualism: In this rendering, such operations tower against the backdrop of the antiquated agrarian model as a kind of colossus, tall and rugged, a benevolent bestower of cheap meat and pristine eggs.

Salatin dismantles this myth. “CAFOs do not stand alone; they are not islands,” he says. Intensive farming methods depend, he argues, on cheap energy to transport food in and waste out, on acres of additional land to produce the feed brought in, and on out-sourced labor. The food produced carries “huge hidden costs” from pollution and sickness. “When you add up the fish kills, aquifer pollution, airborne toxins, nutrient adulteration, and outright pathogens like super bugs from mutated drug resistance, it’s not cheap food and it certainly isn’t healthy,” Salatin told *Sojourners*.

And what about the ability of industrial farming methods to feed more people? “Nobody is hungry because there’s not enough food,” he answered. “For the first time in human civilization, we are throwing away nearly half of all human edible food. If we could double production tomorrow, not a single additional person would be fed.” (The United Nations reports that, worldwide, one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted.)

Animals are a test of our character

Regardless of whether the animals under discussion are those that provide us with food, labor, entertainment, education, or companionship, they all belong to God. Animals are far more than just a resource for human use. Republican speechwriter Matthew Scully writes in *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* that godly dominion is humanity’s “first calling.” Animals are “a test of our character, of [hu]man-kind’s capacity for empathy and for



decent, honorable conduct and faithful stewardship.”

Salatin points out that, in their dependency on us, animals reflect our dependency on God. Further, they provide a “mirror” of how relationships work and how to treat others: good treatment yields one type of relationship; bad treatment, a very different type.

Finally, Salatin says, each species of animal has unique gifts that offer healing to creation. “Cows can prune biomass far more efficiently than humans or machines,” he says. “Pigs can turn compost far more efficiently than humans or machines. Chickens can spread cow pats and debug a field far more efficiently than humans or machines. As a human, my role is to extend redemptive capacity into the landscape, and nothing leverages my gifts or extends my reach better than animals.”

And inasmuch as human flourishing depends on a flourishing economy, systematically humane treatment contributes to both. The early evangelicals discerned, rightly, how inhumanity toward animals dehumanizes us.

Today, humane treatment of animals is increasingly necessary to a thriving economy, a development examined at length by Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, in his book *The Humane Economy*. From the entertainment industry to wildlife management to medical research to food production, Pacelle shows how what is good for animals is, ultimately, good for both people and the economy. When all of God’s creation flourishes, human beings flourish, too.

The consciences of Christians regarding animal stewardship will be awakened, Salatin told *Sojourners*, only when Christians are willing to ask “Does God care?”

The “Every Living Thing” statement on animal care issued last year by leading evangelicals faces this question. In celebrating “the wonder and beauty of God’s creation” and calling for commitment to “compassionate living,” the statement not only reclaims evangelical tradition, but returns to scriptural principles for stewardship of animals. These principles reflect the care shown by God in scripture for animals: from allowing Adam to name the animals to the inclusion of animals in the Noahic covenant, from the instruction in Proverbs 12:10 that the righteous person has regard for the life of beasts to Jesus’ declaration that not one sparrow falls outside of God’s care

A hallmark of evangelicalism is caring about the things God cares about as revealed in scripture. The challenge for evangelicals today is to expand our vision beyond the narrowness of present-day politics and categories, to see what scripture has already said concerning animals, and to heed the wise, historical perspectives of those outside our time and place. Often the way forward in faith requires looking back. ■

Karen Swallow Prior is a professor of English at Liberty University, a research fellow with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and a member of the Faith Advisory Council of the Humane Society of the United States.

The “bio” in bioethics must include how we treat the lives of nonhuman animals • by CHARLES CAMOSY

AT THE HEIGHT of the culture wars in the 1980s, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago gave a lecture at Fordham University on something he called “the consistent ethic of life.” Fortunately for those of us captured by this vision, a *New York Times* reporter happened to be in the audience. The next day’s headline read: “Bernardin Asks Catholics to Fight Both Nuclear Arms and Abortion.”

It got a lot of people talking. Then, as now, it was an incredibly countercultural message that disrupted the liberal/conservative binary of secular political imagination. But Bernardin’s views, though novel in a U.S. context, were articulating the principles of an ancient faith: consistent nonviolent protection and support for life in every circumstance. Within the politics of U.S. culture wars, this means refusing to make distinctions between a child dying of a treatable disease and a child killed by abortion. Instead, we insist that Christ is always with the least among us and that we

must let these little children come to him. Every last one.

The most famous animal-lover

As a Catholic professor of ethics, I’ve spent most of my career thinking about what this consistent protection of life means for bioethics. As a result of my research, I’ve come to believe that the “bio” in bioethics must include how we treat the lives of animals. Or as I prefer to say: how we human animals should protect and care for nonhuman animals. After all, humans are animals too.

I’m not the only one who’s arrived at this conclusion: In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis appealed to a consistent life ethic to underline the urgency of addressing the global climate crisis, which threatens the lives of so many. As you might expect from a pope who named himself after the most famous animal-lover in the church, Pope Francis explicitly included nonhuman animals as intrinsically valuable parts of God’s

Beyond MEAT



creation in need of protection and care. “It is not enough,” he says, “to think of different species merely as potential ‘resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves.” Several chapters later, Pope Francis calls on Christians to “forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.”

Laudato Si’ also critiqued big agriculture for “forcing smallholders to sell their land” and undervaluing crop diversity. Instead, Francis lifted up “small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world’s peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste.” And unlike the “economies of scale” responsible for so much animal suffering, these smaller farms are much better able to care for their animals as the kinds of creatures God created them to be.

Finally, the encyclical declared that experimentation on animals is a moral issue. “Experimentation on animals is morally acceptable only if it remains within reasonable limits [and] contributes to caring for or saving human lives,” wrote Pope Francis.

“Human power has limits and it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.”

Consider the ... mosquitoes?

But despite all Francis said about the broader creation, I feel compelled to note, as someone who has focused much attention on protecting nonhuman animals, where the encyclical could have been more supportive of all God’s creatures.

For one thing, where are the specifics? Almost everyone agrees that there should be “reasonable limits” on animal experimentation; given the general moral principles the pope laid out, what follows about certain kinds of experiments? With regard to which animals? Nothing about this was addressed.

And though the encyclical critiqued big agriculture and “economies of scale,” I was disappointed it lacked any specific consideration of factory farming. What about the intrinsic value of the billions of creatures who suffer so terribly in these buildings? And given the harm this style of farming also does to humans, addressing it would have been perhaps

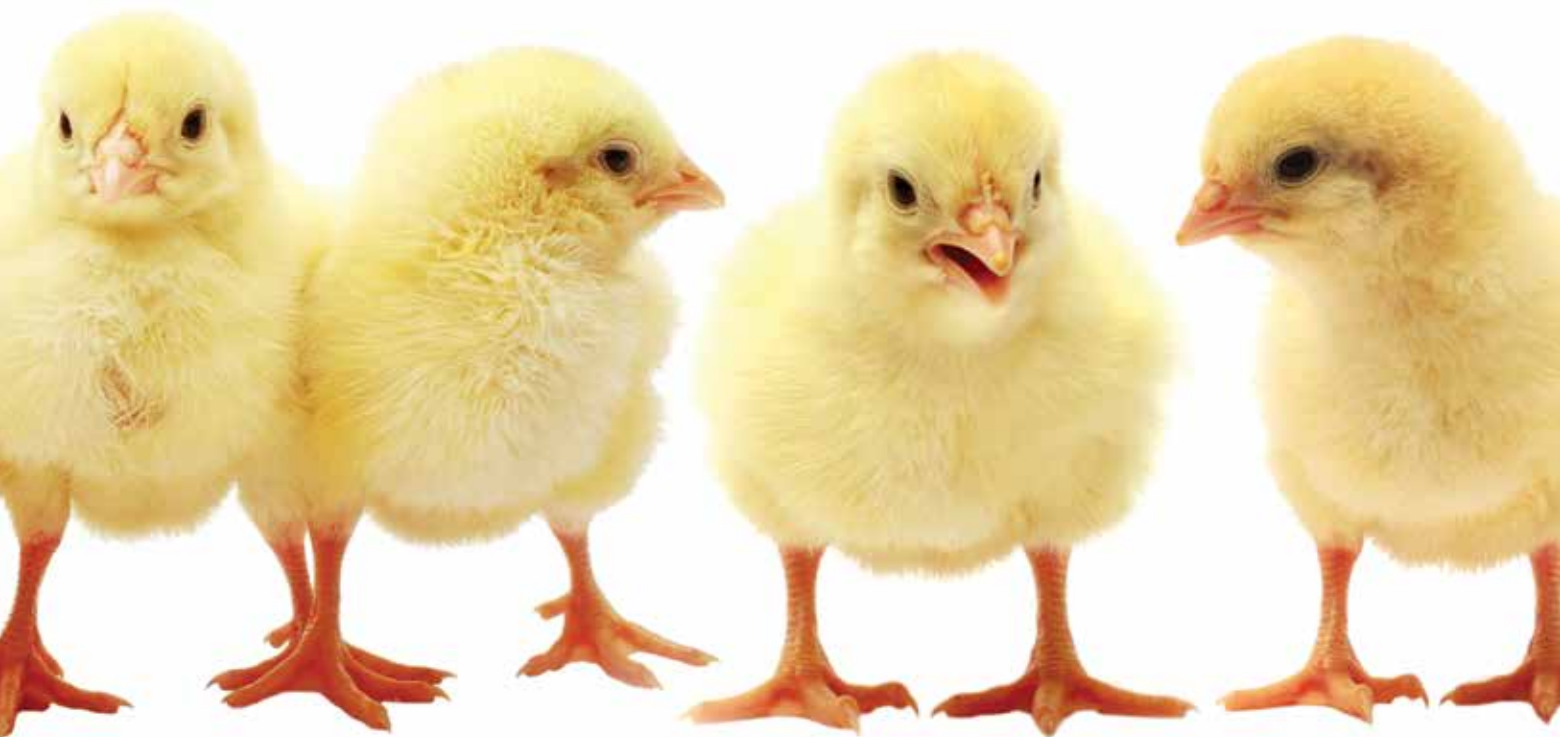
the best example the pope could have used to explain “integral ecology,” the idea that our well-being as humans is closely connected to the well-being of the earth and its creatures.

Finally, at times the encyclical unnecessarily collapses “creation” into one big undifferentiated mass of stuff. For example, the encyclical states that “we can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality” and goes on to talk about “the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us.”

But *any* aspect of reality—really? After the encyclical’s release, people asked me on social media to defend the value of the Ebola virus. And what about the skin cells I kill when I scratch an itch on my arm? Is swatting a mosquito the moral equivalent of growing a pig in torturous conditions for profit?

Admittedly, these three topic areas require careful attention to complex and controversial issues, so perhaps they go beyond the scope of this particular encyclical. But moral theologians from both Catholic and Protestant circles are beginning to give

Genesis tells us that God created animals good, period.



these issues the attention they deserve, and *Laudato Si'* provides a good foundation on which to build this work.

Lambs, lions, babies, snakes

But wait a minute: Didn't God say that we have dominion over the whole earth? Didn't God give us the animals to use for food, clothes, and labor? Didn't God create us as the crown of creation?

It's complicated. Yes, the first chapters of Genesis tell us these things, but they also tell us that God created animals good, period; that God gave both human and non-human animals plants and fruit to eat, not each other; that the reason God brings animals to Adam is "because it is not good for [humans] to be alone."

And yes, God later gives Adam and Eve limited permission to eat meat and use animal skins to cover their bodies, but that is only after sin has entered the picture. The Peaceable Kingdom is envisioned by Isaiah as one in which lambs lay down next to lions and babies hang out with snakes. This is a return to Genesis' vision of the Garden of Eden, a world unstained by sin, death, and violence in which all animals—human and nonhuman—lived together in peace.

The Reign of God is already here, but not yet fulfilled, and Christians have an obligation to be a witness to it. Whatever one thinks of eating or wearing parts of other animals, Christians cannot consistently be a witness to the coming Reign if we support the violence of factory farms, which torture and slaughter billions of animals every year. The dominion that God has given us over creation is one that is to imitate Christ's non-violence and care for those on the margins, those whose dignity is most inconvenient for us to acknowledge and who cannot speak up in their own defense.

Ancient Christian vegans

But there are serious problems everywhere we look, some argue. In a world of limited attention and effort, shouldn't we address human injustice first?

This is an important question, but for many of us changing our eating habits with respect to other animals needn't take away from our other justice work. For most of human history, meat was a luxury or celebration-type food. Our ancient Christian traditions were pretty hard-core when it came to refusing to eat meat. Orthodox Christians are still vegans every Wednesday

and Friday. Add Meatless Monday into the mix and suddenly one is cutting nearly 50 percent of the meat from one's diet!

But let's return to integral ecology. It turns out that protecting nonhuman animals also protects human animals. Animal fat in our blood is a major cause of an epidemic of heart disease. Factory farms are a major contributor to climate change—and treat their mostly poor and undocumented workers terribly. And if you're worried about drug-resistant bacteria, the amount of antibiotics we put into humans pales in comparison to what we pour into these factory-farmed animals.

It turns out that we need not choose between human and nonhuman animals when we commit to protecting and supporting the vulnerable. Our mutual fates and flourishing are bound together. Violence against one ultimately impacts the other. A consistent concern for nonhuman animals is in our best interest as well. ■

Charles Camosy is a professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University and author of For Love of Animals: Christian Ethics, Consistent Action. He is a member of the Faith Advisory Council of the Humane Society of the United States.

**A consistent concern
for nonhuman animals
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as well.**





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Appal





Appalachian Spring

In coalfield communities, a grassroots “people’s pastoral” takes Catholic tradition in a new direction • by BARRY HUDOCK

ON A HOT DAY in summer 2015, Michael Iafrate stared in distress out the window of a tiny Cessna flying over his native West Virginia.

“What I felt,” he said later, “reminded me of what it’s like when you’re driving along a highway and come upon a bad crash. That twist in your gut, knowing that death is happening here.”

Below him was the Hobet Mine site, 10,000 acres of what was once thickly forested mountains but is now a flat and desolate moonscape—the result of three decades of mountaintop removal mining and one of many such sites that now dot the Appalachian landscape.

“It just kept going and going, mile after mile after mile of blank, ravaged land,” said Iafrate, a 39-year-old doctoral student in theology at the University of Toronto’s St. Michael’s College. Flying so close over the scarred landscape that unrolled below the plane, Iafrate thought of the apostle Thomas touching the wounded side of Jesus. “It felt like an encounter with some wounds of Christ on the earth.”

Iafrate’s flight—provided by SouthWings, a small non-profit group of pilots that advocates for environmental preservation by providing bird’s-eye views of the results of inaction—was one step in a project he’d been engaged in for several years. But it effectively brought many hours of research and writing into a harsh and visceral focus.

There was more to Iafrate’s anxiety than topography. There was also history, because the text he was working on would become a follow-up to one of the most significant ecclesial statements in U.S. Catholic history. Both the land and the past insisted: He had to get this right.

Listening to the poor in *This Land*

Back in 1975, the Catholic bishops of Appalachia—a swath of territory, marked by intransigent poverty, that stretches from the northern sections of Mississippi and Alabama up to central New York state—published a major pastoral letter on “powerlessness” in the region. *This Land Is Home to Me* was the fruit of much groundwork by a group of committed laypeople, religious, and clergy called the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA).

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Far left: Demonstrators march in West Virginia to support relocating an elementary school away from a coal plant that was sickening children. At left, Allen Johnson, co-founder of Christians for the Mountains, holding his "cross of coal."

Christians for the Mountains

With the bishops' encouragement and financial support, the CCA had conducted dozens of listening sessions in remote mountain hollows and rural towns. A young doctoral student in theology named Joe Holland had summarized the work in striking, poetic text. All the bishops of the region—25 in all—signed their names to it.

"There is a saying in the region that coal is king," the document said. "That's not exactly right. The kings are those who control big coal, and the profit and power that come with it." The bishops insisted that "the present economic order does not care for its people" and called for Christians to "challenge the rich" and to listen to the poor.

"Coal is the Pharaoh in Appalachia."

This Land sent tremors through the Catholic landscape of the United States. Priests around the country preached at Sunday Masses about the region and its poverty. School children prayed and donated allowances to help the region's poor. And perhaps most consequentially, religious sisters from dozens of orders poured into the region, determined to respond to the bishops' call. Many of them never left.

Twenty years after the publication of *This Land*, the region's bishops marked the occasion with a second pastoral, *At Home in the Web of Life*, calling for more sustainable development and communities in Appalachia.

The sense of the faithful

To anyone who knew the importance of these two letters, the question of a follow-up in 2015, the 40th anniversary of the original, would be a natural one. By 2009, conversations about it had already begun

among the folks at the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. They talked about how things had changed since the last letter: Mountaintop removal had emerged as a dominant and controversial method of coal mining, leaving scores of the region's mountains obliterated, and climate change had become a front-burner issue worldwide.

"We knew the time was right," says Jeannie Kirkhope, coordinator of the CCA and director of the Appalachian Catholic Worker Farm outside Spencer, W.Va.

But the makeup of U.S. church leadership had changed as well. The long pontificate of Pope John Paul II, followed by that of Benedict XVI, had produced a body of U.S. bishops dominated,

as much in Appalachia as anywhere else, by culture-war conservatives. Their actions included the refusal of Communion to pro-choice politicians, chastising the University of Notre Dame for inviting President Obama to speak at commencement, and expanding the celebration of Mass in Latin in their dioceses. It didn't take much discernment to know these same men were not inclined to sign a strongly worded document on economic and environmental justice in Appalachia.

One hot afternoon in August 2009, several of the CCA crew were hashing out these challenges over beers, while they floated on rafts in the middle of a pond at Kirkhope's farm. "We were laughing and pontificating about how the church should be run and how it was still relevant in Appalachia, even though no one in the institutional church was really paying attention to social justice issues," Kirkhope says.

"What we need," another said, "is a

people's pastoral." Not an official document published by the hierarchy, but an expression of—to use the traditional theological term—the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful, through whom, Christian tradition insists, God can be trusted to speak. And the idea was born.

Of course, to express the voice of the people, you first have to listen to it. And listen the CCA did. Over the next four years, the group undertook extensive listening

sessions in communities throughout the region. They sought out the people's experiences and stories about what it means to live and work and struggle and raise a family in Appalachia. They explored the people's faith and their frustrations, their prayer and their politics.

The group approached Holland, the primary author of the 1975 and 1995 letters, about penning the new one. Holland was interested, but—having spent the last several years living in Florida, where he was teaching college—he finally decided he was no longer the right person for the job. The group turned to Iafrate.

A native West Virginian, Iafrate's doctoral studies in liberation theology are an academic expression of his long-term, on-the-ground engagement with a variety of peace and justice causes. But he was initially hesitant to step into the shoes of Holland, admired for decades by Appalachian activists for his work on the previous pastorals. "But then I realized, Joe Holland wasn't 'Joe Holland' yet when he worked on the first pastoral. He was just a doctoral student, in fact."

Iafrate led or participated in many of the listening sessions, and he pored over what came out of all of them. He took the flight over the Hobet Mine site. He visited McDowell County, W.Va., one of the poorest counties in the nation, decimated by the decline of the coal industry. There a friend introduced him to many people; he talked to them and listened to them tell their stories.

"I left McDowell with an ache that has stuck with me ever since. I kept wondering, 'How does a community like this possibly find hope?'"

The stories that shape us

In December 2015, following several rounds of drafts and feedback, the CCA released its “people’s pastoral,” titled *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us*. Without a single bishop’s signature, the document is a rich and soaring reflection on “what it means to follow Jesus in this place.”

It gives voice to the people of various segments of Appalachian society: women, miners, the homeless, LGBTQ people, and more. It also speaks for the natural world, most notably in a striking sidebar that speaks in the voice of a cerulean warbler, and even for the land itself.

Borrowing the Catholic word for the authoritative expression of Christian doctrine usually associated with the teaching of the pope and bishops, the letter invokes “the magisterium of the poor,” the voice of God it insists can be heard “in the still, small voices of the least of our sisters and brothers.” Before this voice and that of the earth itself, the document insists, “all of God’s people, including the powerful, must bow in humility and reverence.”

The document considers such voices in the light of Christian tradition. It decries the “love of money and profit” that distorts human relationships and “lurk[s] in a large number of popular—and largely unquestioned—economic, political, and cultural ideas.” It invokes several past popes and also Pope Francis. It cites the Old and New Testaments, focusing especially on the example and teaching of Jesus.

In an especially strong section, it interprets the experience of Appalachia in light of this tradition. Expressing sorrow over “the crucified Earth,” the letter insists, “Appalachia is still crucified by coal and ... coal industry executives and their political partners are, as Pope Francis says, the Herods of today in our land. King Coal is an empire, a modern tower of Babel.”

Finally, the letter surveys the concrete ways some Appalachian people and communities are replacing consumption-centered living with “satisfaction with ‘enough,’ living in kinship with the Earth community and respectful of the limits of nature.” This includes rejection of “the blasphemy of mountaintop removal,” the development of new food economies, and reconsideration of the politics of a broken democracy.

The spirit of Appalachia

Once released, the letter quickly caught the attention of those most engaged in working for justice in Appalachia and beyond. With a bar set high by the previous two pastorals, the new document appears to have cleared it with room to spare.

“The letter is possessed of the spirit of Appalachia,” says Jonathan McRay, a Virginia-based activist who was

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Workers install solar panels, funded by Solar Holler, on the Shepherdstown (W.Va.) Presbyterian Church.

It's Always Sunny in West Virginia

Generating power, faith, and jobs with Solar Holler.

by ERIN E. TOCKNELL

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, Dan Conant was living a life familiar to generations of West Virginians. Born and raised in the state’s Eastern Panhandle, he’d gone to college and left West Virginia to build a career for himself. But Conant, who was working on community solar panel projects in Vermont, couldn’t shake the feeling that he was needed back home, where the shuttering of the coal industry threatened the few employment opportunities that remained.

“It was almost too easy in Vermont,” he recalled. “I needed to be back in West Virginia.”

In 2013, he and his wife, Laura Nagel, a Pittsburgh native, returned to Jefferson County and “Solar Holler,” a crowd-funded venture that installs solar panels for no cost at nonprofits, was born.

“Free, local electricity allows [nonprofits] to put resources toward what matters—including taking care of our neighbors—and creation,” the organization explains on its website.

Solar Holler’s unique crowd-funding model is designed to function within the restrictions of West Virginia’s power industry legislation that, unsurprisingly, favors coal. Nationally, the solar industry relies on tax credits, for which nonprofits in West Virginia are ineligible. Solar Holler’s early efforts to circumvent this barrier—by selling solar panels directly to a church—were shut down by state lawmakers.

Then Conant contacted Mosaic Power, a Maryland-based company that uses special meters to regulate power usage on water heaters. Under the current model, a nonprofit contacts Solar Holler about getting panels installed and has its electricity needs assessed. Then, the nonprofit’s supporters volunteer to have the Mosaic smart meters placed on their own personal water heaters. Mosaic then passes the energy savings on to the local power plant and gives each participant a \$100 credit for allowing the use of their water heater. (It takes about 75 water heaters to fund a

Solar Holler photos

Continued on Page 28

"We want to make sure the folks who built this country don't get left behind."

Continued from Page 27

solar project.) The volunteers then give their rebate to Solar Holler, and the collected money is used to install a solar array on the non-profit. It's complicated, but it works.

So far, Solar Holler has completely funded and installed two solar arrays, one at a library in Harper's Ferry and the other at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church. Many more projects are in the works across the state. Crowd-funded, low-cost energy is particularly appealing and suitable for congregations.

"We've had dozens of churches coming to us," Conant explained.

Than Hitt, a member of Shepherdstown Presbyterian who led the congregation's partnership with Solar Holler, explained why renewable energy is the right fit for his church. "Shepherdstown Presbyterian is about caring for creation," he said. "People understand very clearly that it is a requirement that we act."

The church's solar panels have worked without a hitch since they were installed in 2014, and the low-cost, clean energy has been a boon to the church's mission. But, Hitt adds, Solar Holler has helped the congregation do more than protect the creation entrusted to them. Funding the project, one water heater at a time, has connected the church to the larger community.

"We have gotten physical energy from this project and metaphysical energy from this project," Hitt said. "With the water heaters, people are part of a team. ... We're connected to the world much more intensely."

BUILDING ON THESE successes, Conant and the Solar Holler team have taken their efforts across the state. They recently announced a partnership with the Coalfields Development Corporation, a community-based organization that provides affordable homes, creates jobs, and generates economic opportunities for low-income families in southern West Virginia, to retrain and employ former coal miners on projects in Huntington and Wayne County. Conant calls the efforts "job training and wealth building."

The decline of coal has been a blow to the Mountain State, but Conant believes West Virginians are uniquely situated to take advantage of the possibilities provided by renewable energy. "West Virginia is a very libertarian state. Solar is a way to take care of yourself. Control your own power, control your own destiny," he said.

"This year, solar will make up half the energy in the world," said Conant. Solar Holler's mission is to address the challenges his fellow citizens face as they seek to make a living in the mountains they've called home for generations. "We want to make sure the folks who built this country and made it what it is don't get left behind." ■

Erin E. Tocknell, author of *Confederate Streets*, teaches English in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Continued from Page 27

raised in the Christian Church of Christ and now identifies with no particular denomination. "It's imbued with a gritty and raw quality because it was derived from the voice of the people living there. You can feel that woven into the seams of the whole thing."

Allen Johnson, co-founder and coordinator of Christians for the Mountains, recognizes "the voices of the disenfranchised" in *The Telling Takes Us Home*. "It understands that the Good News is likely to come from these people, not from books and degrees. And it is trying to call that forth. Coal is the Pharaoh in Appalachia. The pastoral helps us think about how to stop building his pyramids."

Kirkhope has been sharing the letter with the groups of interested college students who come regularly to work and learn at the Catholic Worker farm she directs. She's been fielding requests from teachers for curriculum resources related to the letter. And there's a playwright in Abingdon, Va., working on a play based on the letter.

The U.S. Catholic bishops have taken notice, too. That's thanks in part to Bishop John Stowe, named by Pope Francis in spring 2015 to lead the Diocese of Lexington, Ky. Stowe—a Franciscan friar whose academic background includes extensive work in liberation theology—is a "Pope Francis bishop" if ever there was one. Recognizing a likely ally, the CCA approached him to share their work on the pastoral and received warm encouragement.

Following the letter's release, Stowe sent a copy to every Catholic bishop in the United States with a cover letter that asked them to "join me in reflecting upon this letter and accepting the challenges it presents." He says the responses he has received from his brother bishops have been positive and encouraging—a telling sign of a "Francis effect" among the U.S. episcopate.

The people's pastoral, Stowe says, is "very significant. I'm glad the lay leadership really took the lead to continue the tradition [of the Appalachian pastorals]."

That after-the-fact episcopal thumbs-up to a document composed and released by the lay faithful suggests that the tradition of applying the gospel to the circumstances of Appalachia is now being expressed authoritatively in a new, contemporary—and extremely important—voice. ■

Barry Hudock is the author of *Struggle, Condemnation, Vindication: John Courtney Murray's Journey toward Vatican II*.



A ribbon-cutting for the new solar panel array on a church in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

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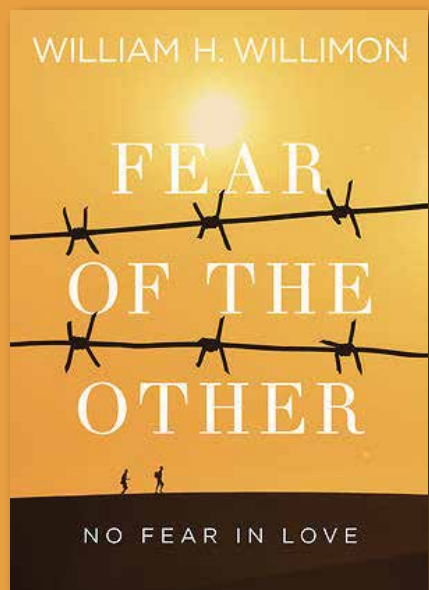
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Poetry

BY GARY W. HAWK

Gospel

Arlee, Montana

When feeling confused,
as if I've trusted a broken compass
or started to believe we might be no more
than scraps of molecular machinery,
I remember this:

During the Grand Entry, on the fifth day
when everyone looks weary
and the morning is already hot,
after nearly a hundred dancers have entered
and made their way around the circle,
stepping lightly to the beat of the drum,
a single white feather falls to the rough floor,
little more than a fluff of milkweed,
a puff of cottonwood drifting down.

But when a watcher spots the feather
he rushes to it and places his hat over it
so that not even the still air on this hot day
might blow it away.

He signals to a veteran from one of our wars,
a man qualified to pick up the feather
and return it to the dancer who lost it,
as likely a prospect, it seems, as returning
a missing feather to the right bird in a sky full of birds;
but for those who keep these traditions,
a version of knowing that even the hairs on our head
are numbered, not even one
could be lost without being missed.

*Gary W. Hawk is a furniture maker, teacher, and
minister in Missoula, Mont.*

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Messed

What three days in prison with Jesus will do.

by CARYN RIVADENEIRA

THERE ARE PICTURES I could not take:

- *The first:* A cowboy leading his chestnut horse across the dewy pasture while a scrappy Jack Russell tugged the dangling rope and a black Lab-mix puppy leapt at its loops. All this was set just behind the ramshackle lake cabin where we stayed, between the lake, where morning fog rose off the waters and curled around cypress trees, and the barns.

- *The second:* Fifty men, maybe, lined up in work blues, shovels held high and straight in the air, faces focused on the rifle-toting man on horseback in front of them. This image landed between barracks and vegetable fields, and yet it could have been picked up and moved back in time. The men, the horse, the rifle would have looked the same set between the master's plantation and the cotton that once grew here.

- *The third:* Four of us, alone in a chapel, thumbing through magazines, looking for the story one of the men with us wrote. We're talking, listening, laughing. My colleague and I sit proper in pews, while the men stretch out before us on the chapel floor, catching rare-gotten rest, their ankles crossed, heads back, telling stories of their first days in this place. Harrowing, heartbreaking, and hilarious, in the way only time can weave them.

- *The fourth:* A panorama of a church, white and steepled at Camp D. Inside, the stage, packed with keyboards, guitars, mic stands, drums, musicians, preachers, and with those offering and those seeking prayer. The faces—white and black, bound and free—singing, praying, smiling, dancing. A picture of heaven, in this unlikely place.

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Jesus doesn't say, "I was in prison *for no reason* and you came to visit me." Just "I was in prison."

• *The final*: All of us at this retreat for pastors, back in the chapel. We've spent two days together, getting to know one another, sharing stories, hearing scripture, singing, meditating, stilling our souls as my friend Dave sings "Slow Me Down," searching for peace in the chaos we have in common. But now, we're back to laughing. Our hosts—the pastors we've joined in their retreat—are remembering the picture of heaven at Camp D from the night before. But they're mocking our dance moves. And we're crying—laughing so hard—recognizing that teasing in love may be the surest sign of sister- and brotherhood in Christ.

These were the moments I longed to reach for my phone, snap a picture, shoot a video. But I didn't. I couldn't. Because I was at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, a maximum-security prison.

The cabin, the lake, the pasture, the fields, the barns, the chapel, and the church were all on prison grounds. The cowboy, the blue-clad men, the men on the chapel floor, the musicians, and the pastors (well, except the ones I traveled with)—all inmates. All convicted, justly or unjustly, of heinous crimes—rape, kidnapping, murder: The sort that gets you sent away to a place like Angola. For life.

Taking pictures just seemed rude

And so, when several of us arrived at Angola to participate in an annual retreat for inmate-pastors that our pastor emeritus has led for years, a warden told us not to take pictures. To do so would require media releases. Red tape and bureaucratic hassles.

I balked. This was public land. That these men lived here was public knowledge. Pictures of prisoners on public land shouldn't be forbidden. It was all *me* and *my* rights against men who'd lost theirs.

But then, the conversation with the cowboy. The men in (work) blue, lined up in the fields, and the chill of past and present shackled realities. The retreat, with its song, prayer, and laughter.

So when I saw the cowboy later, I didn't pull out my phone. Because no longer did I see my rights, or prisoners on public land. Instead, I saw men at home, at work. I saw their humanity—*our* humanity—their private moments, their hearts. But most disturbing of all: I saw Jesus. And taking a picture just seemed rude.

A riff on the *Imago Dei*

In the passage on the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:34-40, Jesus famously offers a riff on the *Imago Dei* (the image of God). When the righteous ask the king, "When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" the reply is, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Until the retreat with men who had gone through Angola's innovative Bible seminary program and now served as pastors to their fellow inmates, I missed a major aspect of this passage. I'd glossed right over the key difference about visiting someone in prison. All the other people named in this parable—the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sickly—they're victims; they're *innocent*, so to speak. Easy to see Jesus there. But the people in prison? They're presumed to be the perpetrators, the ones potentially responsible for causing other people's hunger or thirst or having to leave home or being naked or sick.

Of course, plenty of innocent folks sit in prison, and Jesus himself was condemned unjustly. But Jesus doesn't say, "I was in prison *for no reason* and you came to visit me." Just "I was in prison."

When we visit prisoners, we visit Jesus.

It still disturbs me, all these months later.

One, I can't stop thinking of the victims' families. How horrifying it would be to read these words: A woman spends two days with men who killed or raped or hurt their beloved and goes declaring them Jesus. Nice.

And two, I realize my view is limited. And naïve. Angola famously is not like other prisons. Not that I'd know, actually, having only driven past others and seen the insides from documentaries. But it's what I hear. Once a brutal and bloody prison, Angola's former (and controversial) leaders sought to restore humanity, dignity, and hope to this place. And succeeded on some fronts, according to many prisoners. But even at Angola, with its swampy beauty, lush farm land, and thick woods, and even with its relative freedoms (inmate-cowboys with access to horses and tools without a guard in sight and being granted two free days for a pastors retreat, for instance) afforded to hard-working, well-behaved inmates, there are places where the darkness overwhelms. It's still prison. And the men I didn't meet—the ones who may shake

and sputter and spew nonsense or hatred, the ones not sorry for their actions, not deemed "good enough" for any freedoms—still Jesus.

At least, according to Jesus.

And that's messed up.

My flipped-up, messed-up faith

But the longer I live as a Christian, the longer I live into and try to live out my faith, the more I realize: It's all messed up. Faith. Grace. The whole life-of-Jesus thing. That he messed everything up got him arrested and beaten and nailed to a cross. Messing everything up landed Paul in the horrific world of underground, dark and dank, rat-crap-filled Roman prisons. (No lake cabin, romps with puppies, and delicious breakfasts awaited visitors in Paul and Jesus' day.)

But it's because our faith is messed up, because it's a flipped-upside-down one, because Christianity is nothing if not a holy paradox that we visit Jesus when we visit prison.

It's not about being a do-gooder. Instead, it's the truth and the heartbreaking beauty of something one of my new inmate friends said over gumbo: "It's horrible being known by the worst thing you ever did."

Indeed it would be. Indeed it is.

Truth told: If this man had hurt my child, I'm not sure I'd have the grace to hear this and *not* be able to say, "Good. I hope it's worse than horrible."

But at that lunch table, my flipped-up, messed-up faith took hold and I saw Jesus.

How could I not? How could I benefit from the messed-up grace of God that allows me to be seen by God on high *not* as a horrible sinner full and capable of every last deadly sin but as a beloved child and *not* see others differently myself? It's messed up, but it's true.

It's impossible to laugh, pray, and sing old gospel songs with men who've raped and murdered, who've sold drugs to children, carjacked strangers, shot girlfriends, buried bodies in woods and *not* see grace.

I could not look at lines of incarcerated men, ready for a day's work under the gun (literally), and not shudder at past (and sometimes present) atrocities and injustices. And yet, I could only hope for redemption for this land that no longer grows cotton and for these men who no longer have freedom.

And there's no way I could rub puppies' tummies while talking to an inmate-cowboy

about dogs, to hear him tell me lots of guys here are like pit bulls because they think they're tough, but that those guys don't know—"They're just silly snuggle bugs," he says—and me *not* feel the peace of Christ descend.

I don't know why. I don't know how. I just know it's true: When we visit prisoners, we visit Christ. All during my time in Angola, I saw Jesus everywhere.

I stopped seeing inmates, men who'd done horrible things. Instead, I saw the eyes of the one who paid it all—so that we no longer have to spend an eternity being known by the worst thing, or the even the collection of little horrible things, we've done. Instead we get the hope of being known forever in the same way I know these men, as they know me: messed up, "broken," forgiven, beloved by God, set free by Jesus.

It's another picture I could not take: that of grace. ■

Caryn Rivadeneira, a regular contributor to Christianity Today's Hermeneutics and to Re:Frame Media's ThinkChristian, is the author of five books. The most recent is Broke: What Financial Desperation Revealed About God's Abundance (IVP).



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By Abigail Olcese

Call of **Beauty**

With complex stories and artful design, some video games inspire empathy, not mayhem.

.....

WHEN WE THINK OF ART, we usually think of paintings, literature, or film: media that take us outside of ourselves and help us experience a time, place, feeling, or philosophy. Works of art have the potential to move us, sometimes profoundly.

What we don't think of—not immediately, anyway—are video games. Games are artifacts of pop culture. At best, they're fun, relatively benign distractions. At worst, they're violent, desensitizing affairs promoting antisocial behavior. Video games are not, generally speaking, considered transformative or artistically ambitious.

But that might be changing. In recent years, developments in the gaming world covering everything from graphics to narrative structure are changing the low-culture perception of video games, with complex stories that challenge players and sometimes even help them consider the theological.

Above, a scene from
the video game
That Dragon, Cancer.

40 The Ever-Ending Story

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An excerpt from *We Are Charleston*

identify with a specific emotional or social experience, with the goal of making the player more sensitive to the issue it presents. In the case of *That Dragon, Cancer*, the Greens invite players to share their process of hope, doubt, and mourning through a series of interactive vignettes reflecting their experiences during Joel's illness.

"We created this world and included my son in it to get you to love him, and through that love, let it change you," Ryan Green said. "That's a parallel to how I see the gospel. Part of the design is acknowledging the player and saying, 'I know how you feel.'"

The Greens began making *That Dragon, Cancer* while Joel was still alive. At the time, he was living past the doctors' projections and hitting growth milestones, such as walking and speaking, that his parents had been told not to expect.

"While Joel was alive, we thought we were going to see a miracle, and we constructed the game the way you would a testimony," Amy Green told *Sojourners*. "When he died, we went through a process of [asking], 'Why are we doing this?' We decided we wanted it to say what it was like to be with Joel, and what it was like to play with Joel."

The result is a beautiful, bittersweet game about loss, parental love, and a changing understanding of God. It's a game that is strikingly honest about its creators' faith and doubt, with Ryan and Amy Green often expressing their thoughts in the form of a diary-style voiceover.

"We started with the idea that we're going to teach the player something," Ryan Green said, "but then we learned that we don't have that surety. The reality now is that we're asking more questions [in the game], and we're not offering all the answers."

The Christ-like side of the industry

Writer Drew Dixon has been a fan of *That Dragon, Cancer* since the project's early stages. Dixon is editor-in-chief of *Gamechurch.com*, a website publishing theologically informed reviews of video games, which doubles as an outreach ministry to the gaming community.

"I don't think any game [before] has made me weep," Dixon told *Sojourners*. "I have two daughters, and to this day I can't play the game without thinking of them."

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The Greens invite players to share their process of hope, doubt, and mourning through a series of interactive vignettes.

"Video games are this amazing reflection of how we see the world," video game developer Ryan Green told *Sojourners*. "There's a relationship between the player and the creator of the game that also reflects how we view God. You can see the hands of the designer at any given point."

Letting love change you

Green and Numinous Games, the production company he co-founded with his wife, Amy, are at the forefront of this movement. They're the creators behind *That Dragon, Cancer*, a game detailing the emotional and spiritual journeys of the Greens during their son Joel's four-year battle with cancer, from which he died at age 5.

That Dragon, Cancer is an empathy game, a video game allowing players to interact and

New & Noteworthy



Jazz singer Gregory Porter

SMOOTH TRUTHS

Grammy-winning jazz vocalist Gregory Porter sings love, faith, and even a grooving tribute to nonviolent protest on *Take Me to the Alley*. The title track is a parable of a visiting king who spurns "shiny things" prepared for him and asks to be taken to "the afflicted ones." Blue Note

BROTHERS, IN CHRIST

The Berrigan Letters contains copious personal correspondence between Father Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip across seven decades of activism. The collection is a glimpse into the hopes, dreams, and daily lives of two of the greatest peacemakers of the 20th century. Orbis

FRUIT OF THE VINE

Gisela Kreglinger was raised at a winery in Bavaria, an experience that informed her theology as she began to study and teach about Christianity. In *The Spirituality of Wine*, she examines the role that wine plays in the Bible, the history of the church, religious ritual, and contemporary spirituality. Eerdmans

WHAT IS FREEDOM?

In *Exoneree Diaries*, investigative journalist Alison Flowers seeks to answer the question: Is exoneration the same as freedom? Through the stories of four innocent individuals who served prison sentences, Flowers illustrates another broken aspect of the justice system and the damage it has done to families. Haymarket Books

Up Front and Unadorned

FOR 56 YEARS, Loretta Lynn has rarely paused from recording and touring. A career path that long is bound to have its ups and downs. But the past decade or so has definitely seen a Loretta Lynn renaissance.

It started back in 2004 with the album *Van Lear Rose*, a collection steeped in the rootsy alt-rock aesthetic of Jack White, who produced, played guitar, and even sang a duet with Lynn. Next came the 2010 tribute album *Coal Miner's Daughter*, on which White's band, The White Stripes, was joined by artists ranging from Alan Jackson and Martina McBride to Nashville outsiders Lucinda Williams and Steve Earle to perform a sampling of Lynn's greatest hits. This year has seen the debut of a PBS *American Masters* documentary about Lynn and another startlingly good new album, *Full Circle*.

Both the title and the choice of material on *Full Circle* sound for all the world like a lifetime victory lap for the 84-year-old singer-



Singer-songwriter
Loretta Lynn

who wrote her own songs. She didn't follow the rules of the music business because she and her manager-husband didn't know them. Instead, Lynn came to town as a do-it-yourself phenomenon, promoting her records out of the trunk of the family car.

And her greatest songs had little in common with the manufactured products of Music Row. Many of them were, instead, direct, brutally frank, and heartfelt personal statements about love, marriage, and family that made Lynn a proto-feminist icon. "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man),"

"Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (With Lovin' On Your Mind)," and "Fist City" were chronicles of a stormy, decades-long marriage in which, by all accounts, including her own, Lynn gave as good as she got. Other songs, most notably "One's On the Way" and "The Pill," reflected an honest ambivalence about motherhood that was at the time especially disturbing to the male gatekeepers of popular culture.

That side of Lynn's work is represented on *Full Circle* by a "Fist City" remake that,

like the rest of the tracks, ditches both the countrypolitan sheen of some of her '60s and '70s records and the rough edges of *Van Lear Rose* for stripped-down arrangements heavy on the acoustic sounds. Her versions of traditional tunes "In the Pines," "I Never Will Marry," and "Black Jack David" are revelations that have been far too long in coming. And throughout the album Lynn's octogenarian voice, placed up front and unadorned in the mix, is still miraculously strong and clear.

Despite *Full Circle's* title and its narrative arc, it really isn't the end of anything. Over the past several years, Lynn has been steadily recording in Johnny Cash's old studio out from Nashville, produced by her daughter, Patsy Lynn Russell, and John Carter Cash, son of Johnny and June. She has 93 songs in the can that will be released in a series of albums over the next several years. It seems that Loretta Lynn's last act of DIY defiance will be the defining of her own cultural legacy. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.



Loretta Lynn's honest ambivalence about motherhood was disturbing to the male gatekeepers of popular culture.

songwriter. Telling the story of her career, the collection starts with a re-recording of the first song she ever wrote ("Whispering Sea") and ends with a Willie Nelson duet on "Lay Me Down," a song that features the line, "I'll be at peace when they lay me down." In between, she revisits a couple more of her older songs, and, for the first time, records the kind of traditional old-time material she heard growing up in the east Kentucky mountain community of Butcher Holler.

When Loretta Lynn came to Nashville in 1960, she was without precedent—a female country singer

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Dixon says the game stands out because of what it says about the role of mourning in creating a deeper relationship with Christ.

"Jesus understood the value of grief and lived it out with us. That's what [*That Dragon, Cancer*] is about to me. It's not that grief is easy, but that grief is good. It's that the call to love your neighbor means that you have to be willing to suffer with them."

Dixon says he's a believer in the potential of empathy games, and named a few he found to be mind-expanding experiences, such as *Papo & Yo*, a game about living with an alcoholic parent, or *Cart Life*, about the challenges of low-income single parenthood.

"This is the Christ-like side of the industry," Dixon said, "to share the plight of the immigrants, or to have to make it in a harshly capitalistic world, or to have a child who you can't save from cancer. [Empathy games] help you recognize the image of God in others."

The mechanics are the message

When watching a film, we rely on a variety of elements to communicate meaning, from story to acting to cinematography. For video games, Dixon says, the vehicle for communication is slightly different.

"Some games really are cinematic experiences, where you're just controlling the camera," Dixon said, "But most rely on how you interact with the game. That's how they tell their story."

The kind of story a game tells, and what tools it gives the player to take part in that story—whether it's battling alien hordes, solving a mystery, or building a criminal empire—are known as the game's "mechanics." Dixon says many mainstream games use these interactive elements in a negative way.

"Lots of mechanics can be used to tell a dishonest story," Dixon said. "For example, in games like *Call of Duty* you fix all of the problems in the game by destroying the enemy."

However, there are games changing that trend, most developed by independent companies, such as the Greens' Numinous Games and The Fullbright Company, creators of the game *Gone Home*, which Dixon cites as a well-considered use of mechanics to communicate message.

Gone Home puts players in the shoes of Katie Greenbriar, a college student returning to her family home from a year abroad,



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

THE MOVIES AND MEANING community recently published our list of greatest films, based on the idea that in a great film the highest aims of craft and the most humane visions meet. It seeks a "third way" between one reactionary notion, that art should be judged on the basis of what it portrays rather than how it portrays it, and another—that content is morally neutral. I say bring it all: love and pain and action and laughter and grief and sex and violence and horror and contemplation. To extend Roger Ebert's notion, a movie is not only about what it's about, but it's also about *how* it's about it.

The most beloved films on our list include *The Tree of Life* (in which the most enormous, transcendent existential questions mingle with the most ordinary of tragedies and blessings), *Lone Star* (which aims for nothing less than the healing of U.S. memory, for survivors and perpetrators alike), and *Wings of Desire*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and *Spirited Away* (which use magic and the supernatural to remind us of the miracle of everyday life). The top 10 also includes *Schindler's List*—a testament to monstrous suffering and extraordinary courage alike—and the Three Colors trilogy, which does the seemingly impossible: take a national political virtue and fully embody it in the life of an individual.

The new version of **The Jungle Book**

is too recent for the list and hasn't had the chance to prove its staying power, but what a glorious surprise it turned out to be. The beloved 1967 cartoon is held in great affection, but affection that requires turning a blind eye to its colonialist and racist undertones—particularly the literal aping of some black cultural tropes by a character presented as nonhuman, whose greatest desire is to "be like you." The 2016 version works to transcend white supremacy and even critiques human interference with the rest of nature. When a villain comes to a violent end, it's not through the hero's superior strength but through the bad guy's own selfishness.

Its intellectual companion piece, **Embrace of the Serpent** (now available to watch at home), is as philosophically rich as *The Jungle Book* is fun—a shamanic Amazonian journey into guilt, responsibility, and the vocation to be your highest self. To use Parker Palmer's term, there's a "hidden wholeness" here: Human beings get the chance to discern the difference between the false and true self. It may not be easy, but it's not complicated either. As someone else said, happiness is about discovering what you want and learning how to ask for it.

You know, just the bare necessities. ■

Gareth Higgins is founder of moviesand-meaning.com and irelandretreats.com.

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BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

only to find an empty house and a cryptic note from her sister, Sam. As Katie, players explore the Greenbriar home, slowly uncovering what's happened.

Gone Home is a story-exploration game, meaning that players are allowed to freely interact with their environment, piecing together the story based on clues they find. It's a form of narrative structure dictated less by action and more by the player's emotional connection to the game.

"Many traditional games have the player interact with their world through some form of action—typically combat, sometimes shooting," Kate Craig, a game designer at The Fullbright Company, told *Sojourners*. "When you remove the action-oriented verbs, like run or shoot, what you're left with is a quieter environment that a player doesn't need to rush through. They can take their time and look around without pressure or time limits."

Craig says she's glad to see the gaming industry turning toward an emphasis on intimate, detailed storytelling.

"Writers are hugely important in the creation of a strong game and I'm delighted they're finally starting to get the appreciation they deserve," Craig said. "I hope [narratively detailed games] can stand alongside traditional games but offer something different in theme and approach, and hopefully appeal to people that might not have been interested in games in the past."

A new kind of fellowship

Just as with any form of narrative art, Dixon says video games can communicate a point of view worth considering and exploring.

"If everyone is made in the image of God, that means that everyone has something they're offering us," Dixon said. "We [Gamechurch] choose to highlight truth and beauty in video games ... and we also note when that truth and beauty is being discarded."

And just as the creative process behind a novel, film, or painting can transform both artist and audience, so can the creation of a game be transformative for players and designers.

"We went into presenting *That Dragon, Cancer* like a lot of Christians do about putting something into popular culture," Amy Green said. "We were expecting pushback, and we were amazed at how little there's

been. I think that's due to the fact that we're telling our own story."

In fact, reactions to the game at industry conferences have brought moments of deep emotional connection. "We've had lots of hugs, with every type of person," Ryan Green said. "It's this fellowship I didn't anticipate, but now I can't give it up."

Ryan Green says that fellowship, interacting with players and other game developers, has been a life-changing experience.

"It's made me want to be a peacemaker, not a culture warrior," Ryan Green said. "Why pick a fight with the people we should be hugging?" ■

Abigail Olcese (@indieabby88), a former advertising assistant at Sojourners, is a freelance writer based in Kansas.

Reviewed by Greg Williams

THE EVER-ENDING STORY

How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World, by Alissa Wilkinson and Rob Justra. Eerdmans.

THE WORLD IS falling apart.

Admittedly, the world has always been falling apart—since Christ's resurrection, we've been living in the last age, and the New Testament is full of an apocalyptic expectation—but in our modern world, we seem to be spinning apart even faster. In our pop culture, either "winter is coming" or zombies are. Robots who look just like us are threatening genocide or a perverse "Capitol" is forcing our kids to kill each other. *How to Survive the Apocalypse*, by Alissa Wilkinson and Rob Justra, looks at this theme in modern culture and what it might tell us about ourselves.

This is a book written by college professors, and I mean that in the best possible way.



They define their terms, keep us engaged, and push us toward engaging the world like the best professors do. And, like all good professors, they are honest about their ideological approach: They are strongly neo-reformed and use Charles Taylor's opus *A Secular Age* to interpret the culture that they address.

Indeed, *How to Survive the Apocalypse* is basically a fleshing out of Taylor's description of the modern age (and its difference from a pre-modern era) through fictional ends of the world. Wilkinson and Joustra examine individualism and autonomy, a quest for and skepticism of authenticity, and the appropriate source of power (the questions and obsessions that Taylor sees at the root of modernity) through a half-dozen TV and movie apocalypses and dystopias, ranging from *The Hunger Games* to *Her*. These questions press all the more in our age, in which we seem to have lost the transcendent.

This secularity makes the turn to the end of the world strange because, as Wilkinson and Joustra note, "apocalypse demands ... religion." In edge situations, we can't escape from dealing with serious questions of morality or how the world ought to work: What it means to be human and what it means to be dead.

Our modern apocalypses are good at showing the world fraying but worse at showing us how we might stitch it back together. They set up countless situations where we need something beyond the human but can't quite reach it.

Christians have to respond to the pathos of the apocalyptic mindset that dominates our TV and movie landscape. It points to a primarily moral crisis in which we feel that the center cannot hold and that anarchy is loosed upon the world. In light of this, Wilkinson and Joustra encourage us to practice what James Davison Hunter might call "faithful presence." They want us to realize that in a deeply conflicted modern age, we can't fix everything "but we can make better choices, choices that open up more promise than peril in our modern life together."

How to Survive the Apocalypse is weakest when it doesn't explore what these apocalyptic or dystopian themes could tell us about a pursuit of justice. Positions of collapse are also positions of opportunity. The neo-reformed social theory that Wilkinson and Joustra use is deeply conservative, in a very

good sense: The world has plenty worth conserving. It can, however, tend to obscure our need to grow past the current structures of the world into a place that can more adequately reflect the beauty of God's kingdom.

The end of the world has been coming for 2,000 years, so you'd think we'd be getting good at it. In the modern age, though, all of our anxieties manifest through the end of the world, but we don't have anything to reveal at that end—we just see naked power at the root of it all. Wilkinson and Joustra use Taylor's framework from *A Secular Age* to expound on that and, like the good professors they are, inspire readers to make some change while we still can. ■

Greg Williams is communications director at an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.

Reviewed by Rosalie G. Riegler

LIVING AND LEARNING NONVIOLENCE

Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist, by David Hartsough with Joyce Hollyday. PM Press.

Teaching Peace: Students Exchange Letters with Their Teacher, by Colman McCarthy. Vanderbilt University Press.

WHAT LIVES THESE two authors have lived and what lessons they can teach us! Reading David Hartsough's lively memoir immerses us in the great peace and justice events of the last several decades. Colman McCarthy's fascinating interchanges with high school and university students propel us into a hopeful future as we see how young minds are stretched and carry lessons learned into the world.

Hartsough's FBI file started when he organized his first anti-nuclear protest at age 15, and it may be growing still as he directs Peaceworkers, a nonviolent training and accompaniment NGO based in San Francisco. In between are 60 years of peace work in the U.S. and the flashpoints of the world, always bringing the message of the necessity and efficacy of nonviolent direct action. In *Waging Peace* he relives the adventurous life of a professional peacemaker as

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EXCERPT

WHAT IS **FORGIVENESS**?

On June 17, 2015, a young white man walked into a Bible study at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., and sat quietly until the benediction, when he shouted racist statements and opened fire. The suspect, Dylann Roof, was arrested the next day. Killed were Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson, Tywanza Sanders, Ethel Lee Lance, Cynthia Graham Hurd, Rev. Daniel L. Simmons Sr., Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, and Susie Jackson. After the killings, some family members expressed their forgiveness.

THERE ARE CYNICS who assume these extraordinary expressions of forgiveness were only a trip of the tongue when these family members were put on the spot—but if that's true they would have recanted their statements or qualified them somehow. Each said something distinctly different at the bond hearing, and all the complexities and contradictions that weave their anger and grief into the notion of forgiveness must be considered. This forgiveness is not easy; it is quite the opposite.

But not every family had a representative at the bond hearing, and not all the family members feel the same way about forgiveness. Forgiveness itself is as complex as any human action. These extraordinary expressions of forgiveness do not suggest acceptance, nor do they imply forgive and forget.

Cynthia Graham Hurd's brother, Malcolm Graham, was driving to Charleston from his home in Charlotte when he heard the bond hearing unfolding on National Public Radio. "When I heard the first person and second person say, 'I forgive,' I said, 'That's the sound bite. The media jumped on it and spread that forgive thing across nine families,' which is not true," he says. "If my sister was [killed by a distracted

driver] ... and the person immediately said, 'Please forgive me' ... I would be very upset, but forgiveness would come a lot easier."

Ethel Lee Lance's daughter Sharon Risher is "not there yet." As a pastor, she acknowledges the need for forgiveness, but she considers it a process with no time limit. "The God I believe in is patting me on the back, saying, 'You take your time.'"

Murder may be the hardest kind of death to process, and unfathomable grief is coupled with anger. In Charleston the media attention has exacerbated the situation; something private became public immediately, in ways that were unexpected and out of one's control. Ashland Magwood Temoney, DePayne Middleton-Doctor's niece, said as a Christian it is expected of her to forgive. "But it is really hard, and at times I am very angry. I am sick of hearing the news or seeing anything about the trial. It reminds me of that night all over again. It infuriates me that she had so much to live for and four girls who depended on her." ■

From We Are Charleston, by Herb Frazier, Bernard Edward Powers Jr., and Marjory Wentworth (copyright 2016). Used by permission of Thomas Nelson, thomasnelson.com.

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well as the silent efficacy of his family's tax resistance and tradition of simple living.

Whether disarming with words a knife-wielding segregationist opponent at a Virginia lunch counter, blockading with a canoe a weapons ship bound for Vietnam, or traveling to war zones, Hartsough has faithfully carried forward his commitment to nonviolence. Sometimes visiting conflict sites before they reach the radar even of other peace people, he writes of going to Cuba, Russia, Yugoslavia, and the Berlin Wall while still a college student, to Central America during the '80s, and later to Gaza and other war zones.

In 1999, after trying unsuccessfully to persuade the world to support nonviolently the beleaguered Kosovars and thus avert a Serbian bloodbath, Hartsough attended a peace conference in The Hague. There he met Mel Duncan, and together they founded the Nonviolent Peaceforce, now the largest of several worldwide movements of accompaniment for nonviolent activists.

In California, Hartsough worked to launch the huge Abalone Alliance against the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant and campaigned against the development of nuclear weapons at the University of California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. In this century, Hartsough was one of the first to be arrested for protesting drone warfare at Creech Air Force Base.

The highlight of this engaging memoir is his deep involvement with the 1987 Concord, Calif., blockade of trains carrying weapons to Central American dictatorships. He writes movingly about the day the train didn't stop and fellow activist Brian Willson lost his legs below the knee (among other serious injuries).

Waging Peace is not only a compelling memoir, it's a useful peace manual, with a section of resources for further study and action.

MCCARTHY'S *Teaching Peace* is a manual of a different kind, an epistolary narrative in the tradition of the Catholic Worker, where questions and answers contribute to a clarification of thought that often moves people to action.

McCarthy, like Hartsough, excels at making connections, both between



*"I am definitely serving time."
-Beverly Walker*

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movements for justice and peace and between people who embody them with their lives. In 1982, McCarthy, then a columnist for *The Washington Post*, wanted to see if nonviolence could be taught, both inside and outside the classroom. This book shows that it can and inspires all of us to not only walk the walk, as we are shown by Hartsough, but to do what is often harder—to talk the talk. We need to talk about nonviolence as McCarthy does, to everyone, not just the ones who agree with us or with whom we feel comfortable talking.

His answers to student letters are full of riveting and sometimes wry details, as we learn of his career as a teacher, first at one of the poorest high schools in Washington, D.C., and later at suburban high schools and colleges such as Georgetown and American University. In 1985 he founded the Center for Teaching Peace, and he remains an advocate for peace studies programs. As McCarthy frequently says, “Unless we teach

them peace, someone else will teach them violence.” His reflections on teaching remind us that reading and conversation develop student minds. Both abound in McCarthy’s classrooms, as I witnessed when I visited one several years ago.

His letters continue the teaching. For example, he gives straight talk to a former student who writes him from the Naval Academy: “You are being trained to ... kill people and destroy property if the order is given.” Then he invites her to sit in on his seminar at Georgetown Law on “Law, Conscience, and Violence.” She comes, commuting between Annapolis and D.C., and later completes her naval commission while attending law school at night. One day she returns to his class, this time as a guest lecturer, describing how she gathered evidence from torture survivors so war criminals in Somalia could be prosecuted.

Particularly interesting are letters that span several years, such as between McCarthy

and Ryan Hehman. After meeting McCarthy at Catholic University, Hehman is inspired to go to a Catholic Worker house in Phoenix. Five years later, he writes to his former prof, reflecting on that experience and his life in an intentional community. Hehman made the connections, as do the Peace Corps volunteers who write to McCarthy from their posts abroad and the students who thank him for inviting peaceworkers from many fields to speak in his classes.

Both books ask provocative questions, as all good lessons do. Read them and let answers grow in your heart as you move toward your own peacemaking decisions. ■

Rosalie G. Riegler is on the national committee of the War Resisters League and is associated with Su Casa Catholic Worker in Chicago. Her latest oral histories are Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace and Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community.

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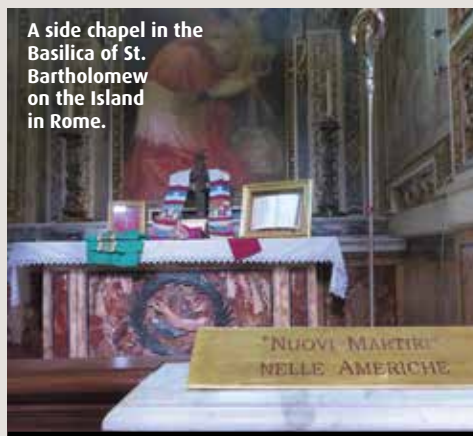
Should I Care *More* When a Christian is Killed?

THE BASILICA OF St. Bartholomew on the Island in Rome holds the bones of the apostle St. Bartholomew, who delivered the gospel of Matthew to India, southern Arabia, and Syria. Spreading the seditious good news eventually got him killed—crucified upside down in Baku, capital of modern Azerbaijan. Bartholomew proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus until the soldiers cut off his head.

In 1999, this church nestled on an island in the Tiber River was dedicated to modern Christian martyrs. Entering its cool interior, one can walk a global Via Dolorosa—each side altar is dedicated to parts of the world where Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox have been killed for their faith.

The relics include a letter from Franz Jägerstätter, the Austrian farmer beheaded for refusing to serve in Hitler's army, and the misal of Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero left on the altar when he was assassinated during Mass in 1980.

Christians today fall out over Christian martyrs and persecution in a right/left divide. We fight



are 7,000 to 8,000 Christian martyrs each year, a number that roughly matches the Open Doors World Watch List, which reported 7,106 Christians killed in 2015, an increase over previous years and far less than one Christian every five minutes.

Schirmacher defines Christian martyrs as “Christians who are killed and who would *not* have been killed had they not been Christians.” Straightforward, right? But consider that the countries with the greatest number of Christians killed—Nigeria, Central African Republic, and Chad (according to World Watch Monitor)—are all countries with brutal post-colonial violence mixed with militant-extremist agendas. Religion—or any other single motivation—is rarely the only issue involved in martyrdom or persecution.

Why do some Christians focus on the cause of *Christian* persecution while others focus on the cause of suffering and injustice regardless of creed? Fuller Theological Seminary's Charles Tieszen says this may reflect different theological frameworks. Tieszen's research finds that many Christians can fall into two camps: those who think Christian persecution no longer

happens and those who tie the statistics of modern martyrdom “to eschatological events ... and therefore advocate primarily (or even exclusively) for [Christian] ‘brothers and sisters.’”

“Progressive Christians,” Tieszen told me, “have long placed an emphasis on social justice, not (traditional) witness/evangelism.

Such a posture lends itself to broader kinds of advocacy. ... It has often been ‘conservative Christians’ who have shown a particular interest in religious persecution advocacy.”

Should Christians care *more* for other Christians who suffer than for non-Christians? Theologically, no. It is in the act of advocating and caring for “the other” that we become the followers of Christ we claim to be. This is the Christian paradox: One must empty oneself of Christian tribalism in order to be more Christ-like. However, it is also true that one learns to love at home. It makes sense that one would first learn to advocate and care for those with whom one shares something in common, like faith. But love must then flow outward.

On the altar steps inside St. Bartholomew there is an ancient stone wellhead carved with the image of the Risen Christ. The natural spring beneath it offers healing water for all who suffer. Graffiti on the bridge leaving the island could be Christ speaking today: “I love you from here to the end of the world, from here to the end of time.” ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



Religion is rarely the only issue involved in persecution.

about numbers. In 2015, Christian Freedom International released an often repeated statistic suggesting that Christians are “martyred for their faith every five minutes.” This has been widely debunked. But it raises questions about definitions, methodologies, and theological perspectives.

Thomas Schirmacher directs the International Institute for Religious Freedom, which runs a research project with several universities to measure Christian persecution. He estimates that there

Judy Goode



Simone Weber, center, sits with customers at Table Grace Cafe in Omaha, Neb. At right, Matt Weber in the restaurant's kitchen.



Table Grace Cafe photos

Matt and Simone Weber

Bio: In 2011, Matt and Simone Weber co-founded Table Grace Cafe in Omaha, Neb.—a community lunch cafe staffed with volunteers who participate in a 10-day restaurant internship program. Simone is a Nashville-recorded singer-songwriter and Matt has culinary training from the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York. Together, the Webers spread a message of grace along with a cup of homemade soup and gourmet pizza.

Website: tablegracecafe.com

1 Why did you decide to incorporate a job assistance program?

Matt: I knew that we would be using volunteers off the street every day, since that's one way people can get food—if they can volunteer. We were running into people who were in transition, from jail or homelessness, and could use that service. And because I have culinary training and education, it was easy for me to come up with this concept.

2 I hear you don't have a cash register at the cafe.

Matt: That's right. It's a donation box instead of a cash register. We have no prices on our menu. We tell people what the food is worth, but we don't require a certain amount. We believe that everybody is able to be generous no matter where they are in life. By allowing people to give a free-will donation, we're meeting people where they are and inviting them to give what's generous for them.

3 Why is it important for your food to be nutritious and delicious?

Matt: Whenever I talk about Table Grace and eating healthy, I ask the question, "If someone were homeless, trying to improve their life situation, do you think they have a better chance of doing that if they are fed healthy food or unhealthy food?" The answer is very obvious. We all function better if we have healthy foods to eat. We live in a society where restaurants are oftentimes hip and trendy—it's entertainment as much as it is anything. But food is our fuel, and so it should be healthy. But it also can be delicious.

4 Your mission is "to nourish hungry bodies and souls." How do you nourish souls?

Simone: Music is one way we nourish the soul. Just by sharing music, it's a spiritual experience. Another way is, on Thursdays, we invite people from all walks of life to come together and talk about their journey of faith. We

often utilize scripture, but of course we keep the door open to people who are challenged by faith or don't have a faith at all. Everyone is welcome to come around that table and share in the journey of life, and hopefully find God's presence through the community there.

5 What would you tell people who want to do hunger outreach in their communities?

Matt: I would give the resource that has been our main inspiration: the book *Toxic Charity*, by Robert Lupton. I would say read that book and try to frame whatever you do around that philosophy. We have to consider equality and equal distribution of resources, but we have to do it in a way that empowers people instead of enables them.

Simone: The issues that we're tackling and the way that we're choosing to live them out are a marathon, not a sprint. If we want to be an example of a compassionate, radical, hospitable community, we have to approach it as a marathon. We have to invite others into it and engage the community deeply in order to sustain it over the long haul.

—Interview by Olivia Whitener

A row of matches with one lit, set against a dark red background. The lit match is on the left, with a bright yellow and orange flame. The other matches are unlit and have red tips. The background is a solid dark red color.

How has Sojourners INSPIRED YOU?

Perhaps you've been inspired to work for racial justice in your community after reading Jim Wallis' new book, ***America's Original Sin***. Maybe you've found a new way to understand and talk about your faith. Or perhaps the biblical call to social justice has become foundational to your values.

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Extravagant Kindnesses

THE “DOG DAYS” OF SUMMER refers to more than the weather. Attendance in churches is often down due to travel. The energy level is low, with students away and families scarce. The church year tends to gear up with the academic one, to peak with Christmas, to peak again with Easter, and then to peter out into the summer. How do we stay invigorated? How do we energize our faith with the zeal of the psalmist: “Come and see what God has done: God is awesome in deeds among mortals” (Psalm 66:5)?

I challenge churches to do something different with the summer—turn the dog days into an excuse to take risks. “Something different” will differ with context. Try a dialogue sermon. Answer live tweets from the youth. Preach a sermon entirely in the interrogative mood—nothing but questions or one that, like the psalms, is addressed solely to God. Invite testimonies about faith and service. Invite mentors who inspired you into ministry to offer their story during worship or Bible study. With the elections coming, talk about how the church has engaged with politics through history—and don’t leave out the bad stuff. Immerse yourself and your community more deeply in the gospel for the renewal of your life together, always an aspect of church and worship.



Summer is often a season of travel and meeting strangers. Remember that Abraham and Sarah offered extravagant kindness when they met three strangers in the desert. How can we become known, like Abraham, as “the friend of strangers”?

Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.

[JULY 3]

A Livable Faith

Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-9; Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11,16-20

ST. AUGUSTINE describes breast milk as a sign of the goodness of God. Who would dare say he’s wrong? It’s so *there*—abundant, nurturing, creating intimacy. It’s like God with all of us. But Augustine isn’t being original here. Isaiah is. God is a nursing mother, Israel is a nursing child, and both are happy with one another.

Eugene Peterson has made a career of insisting on the “livability” of scripture. We can *do* this stuff—with a healthy dose of the Spirit’s power. Coastal Church, a Pentecostal congregation in downtown Vancouver, made Luke 10 a sort of constitution for its life together. Rather than preach or protest at people, it has made a point of visiting people’s homes (already difficult in an age that loves privacy). They offer blessing. They ask what hurts and pray for it. They eat together. And they speak of the reign of God. The church has grown, lonely neighbors find surprising friends, and the reign is manifest.

What if we also treat Galatians 6 as

livable? Restoring transgressors, gently bearing burdens, crucifying our old selfish desires for advancement and going out of our way instead for the neediest neighbor. That would be an encroachment of friendship in the midst of the anonymous and angry mob that is our culture. And it is eminently livable. It might even be fun.

[JULY 10]

The Fine Print?

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

ONE OF THE unfortunate stereotypes about faith is that it presents impossible-to-keep rules designed to stop anyone, anywhere, from having any sort of fun. Deuteronomy is already hard at work to undo this myth. Deuteronomy has presented God’s laws, precepts, ordinances—the way God would have a holy people live. Israel traditionally counts

613 of these commandments. They are not onerous. They are life-giving. They make for thriving, flourishing joy. God is not tragically far away and God has not set the bar too high for us: “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (Deuteronomy 30:14; see also Romans 10:8).

In fact, one thing faith constantly does is *critique itself*. Try to criticize God’s people all you want—you’ll never be as scathing as the prophets in the Bible are of God’s people. Jesus joins the prophets with stories such as the Good Samaritan. A lawyer unsatisfied with the gentleness of Deuteronomy asks for the contractual fine print: “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with perhaps his most famous parable. A priest has a chance to do good to someone abused. So does a Levite. They don’t. Hold your wagging tongue, you Christians. That priest is us. Stop your judging. That Levite is us. The Samaritan who does good is our worst enemy: a sellout, a member of the opposite political party, a terrorist.

That’s the way faith works. It sets up an inside and outside group. And then the Bible insists that only those on the outside are actually in.

[JULY 17]

Friend of Strangers

Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

THESE TEXTS INVITE homework. Take up the charge to offer hospitality to someone outside your normal circle of family and friends. Report back to your community what you learned about God.

Abraham is our model for this. The extravagant kindness he and Sarah offer to three strangers in the desert is why some churches call the patriarch the *philoxenia*, friend of strangers. In an age of blanket vilification of immigrants, this would be a risky sort of friendship to imitate. In the heat of the day, these strangers are urged to come, rest, eat, and drink. Abraham *runs* (who runs in the desert?!). Sarah prepares the fatted calf. This is beyond letting a stranger use the toilet. This is treating strangers like long-lost kin—which, biblically speaking, is what strangers are.

Mary and Martha offer the most famous New Testament story about hospitality. Mary sits and listens to Jesus. Martha serves the gathered community. Both are necessary for us to do. But Martha asks Jesus to intervene and get her sister to help. He won't. Mary is fully attending to Jesus, their guest. As important as feeding the guest is (and Abraham and Sarah show it supremely important), lavishing attention on him or her is more important still.

The Christian life is a matter of discerning Christ in surprising places—here in the neighbor, elsewhere in the enemy, or even in the mirror. Christ is present in all things—in Christ all things hold together. Church is where we practice seeing Jesus where we didn't expect, and rejoicing in finding him again.

[JULY 24]

Saving Cities

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138;
Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13

SODOM AND GOMORRAH are often used as shorthand for a wrathful God punishing "certain sorts" of sins. This Sunday is a perfect chance to correct that error. Elsewhere, Ezekiel 16:49-50 makes clear that Sodom's sin is failing the poor. But this story in Genesis 18 emphasizes God's malleability in response to Abraham's prayers: "God! You're vain! You don't want people to think you unjust! You won't kill 'em all if there are only 50 righteous people in town, will you?" God's reply? "No, I guess I won't." Abraham talks God down to 10. This is a Middle Eastern bazaar. The one praying barter with God, flatters God, manipulates God.

What if we prayed with such ... liveliness?

Jesus teaches us his own sort of prayerful liveliness in Luke's less-famous version of the Lord's prayer. Some clauses are left out here, but some distinctive teachings are added. If a friend bangs on your door, you'll give him something, just to shut him up, won't you? Which terrible father gives their kid a scorpion or snake instead of an egg or a fish? Even a terrible God will answer better than that.

And we don't have a terrible God. God longs for us to ask, seek, knock. God may even relent when we try to twist God's arm,

presumptuous as that is of us. God, will you restore civility to our civic life? Will you restore vibrancy to our communities? Will you spread your goodness anew to every part of creation?

[JULY 31]

The Fool's Life

Ecclesiastes 1:2,12-14, 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-12; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

ECCLESIASTES MIGHT be the perfect aid for the summer doldrums. Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity! Of what value is our work, our play, our prayers? None. Robert Jensen once wrote that Friedrich Nietzsche could have spared the world his voluminous fulminations with a single footnote to Ecclesiastes.

Ancient Christians learned from Jews to put Ecclesiastes in relationship to Proverbs and Song of Songs. The Proverbs teach us basic lunch-box wisdom. Ecclesiastes, a middle step, teaches us that any worldly achievement is worthless. Song of Songs teaches our souls the delight of intimacy with God and all God's friends. This ladder is not climbed just once, but over and over again in our life with God. We constantly forget what's valuable. We need to remember not to rush after what everyone else rushes after. And we must constantly urge ourselves toward the one thing that actually matters: intimacy with God and all that God has made and longs for.

Luke's gospel illustrates this perfectly. The fool has a bumper crop and tears down the barns to build bigger barns. None of this is foolish. Here's what is: not sharing that excess with others. That very night the fool's life is required, and what does he have to show for it? Some bigger barns that he can't take with him.

Can you imagine how badly we need Ecclesiastes' hard scrubbing brush against our malformed desires? A world that degrades the enemy and exalts acquisition needs from us a strong biblical "no." So too do our souls. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.



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No Good Deed Goes Unscratched

THIS HAS BEEN a year of harsh rhetoric, vicious condemnations, and flagrant name-calling, and that was just between Apple and the FBI. It was much worse in politics, with candidates hurling invective at a pace not seen since, okay, last year. They've called each other every name in the book—a book that would be banned in most public libraries—and have made our political institutions the laughingstock of the world. And not in a good way.

Having frequently been a laughingstock myself, I know how much fun it can be, but this feels different. The very character of our nation seems to be turning into a bad-tempered sourpuss. And not in a good way. Having frequently been a bad-tempered ... (Editor's note: *Just get on with it!*)

In this time of political rancor and unrestrained social hostility, Americans are yearning for words of kindness. They are craving that

The cat *without* the hat is even worse.

rare note of hope. Unfortunately, I cannot provide this. It pains me to do so, but I must join in the refrain of negativity.

I really don't like our cat.

LIKE MANY CANDIDATES, this cat came without being requested, but unlike Marco Rubio, he never left. We heard his desperate mewing outside our home and took pity on this helpless newborn. We fed him from a bottle for a couple weeks, amused by his playful biting and scratching, unaware he was just practicing until his jaws strengthened and his claws grew more lethal. Now, he's fully grown and no longer cute. (His head is angular, like John Kerry's, but without the heavy-lidded weariness of diplomatic responsibility and enormous private wealth.)



He basically rules our small home, a place whose normal-looking outside hides a frightening secret within. It's like that remote farmhouse where fun-loving young people seek refuge after their car breaks down. The house seems welcoming at first, but then a strange, rending sound is heard (the cat ripping the shower liner), or a crash in the near distance (the cat knocking over precious heirlooms, but not the ugly ones). Walking into a room, the young people sense they're not alone, and then someone's leg is suddenly grabbed from under the couch, or clawed at from behind a chair.

And then the first body is discovered down by the lake.

Okay, not that last part. The horror movie analogy only works until the phantom menace comes clearly into view, a harmless-appearing cat that, at the moment, is drinking from the toilet. This makes the beast considerably less threatening, but no less disturbing. (When a dog drinks from the toilet, it's gross in a funny way. When a cat does it, it's just disgusting.)

HIS NAME IS Panda, because of his coloring, but I would have preferred the name "Lucifer in the Flesh," if that sufficiently captured the depth of his demonic behavior. It does not.

He greets my return home each evening by leaping over the tops of

furniture and onto my leg, which causes me to cry out in pain and indisputable logic: "*Bad monkey!*" And then he starts clawing his way into whatever bag or backpack I've put on the floor.

When we've had enough of his hellish comportment—or run out of the isopropyl alcohol for our many flesh wounds—we fling him into the basement, where he spends his time loudly scratching at the door.

Our other cat—cooperative, affectionate—consistently gets the popular vote, but Panda's behavior gets all the media attention. And when he feels the public is insufficiently mindful, he meows with a vocal timbre that can only be construed as vulgar. He's cursing at us. In cat.

IT'S NOW OBVIOUS that Panda is feral, but Will Ferrell he's not. He was born on the mean streets of D.C., posed as a helpless little orphan, and infiltrated our innocent home to wreak the havoc of his lineage. Even the guinea pigs don't like him, despite the empathy their own utter lack of domesticity would suggest. (Trying to take hold of a guinea pig is like chasing a chicken, which you don't want to do in the minefield of a child's bedroom.) The guinea pigs don't share our fear of this feline beast, because they know they're too big to swallow. Not that Panda hasn't tried.

IN THIS election year of so many shocks and disappointments, we don't know if Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will make a good president. But we do know who makes for a very bad cat. He's here with me now, watching my fingers as I type, wondering which ones I could live without. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



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